

# BANDWAGON

JOURNAL  
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CIRCUS  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

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FRED D. PFENING, JR., EDITOR

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

This 1880 Cooper and Bailey three sheet proclaims it was "Positively the Very Best Show in the Whole World." Quite possibly it was; certainly this is one of the very best showbills surviving from the period. Its rich colors and attention to detail make it an exceptional poster, one of the best to come out of the Strobridge Lithograph Company's presses.

The original is part of the collection at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The color separation was made with the help of Bill Biggerstaff.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Publisher. (9-3-87)

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#### THE PRESIDENT COMMENTS

This is the largest issue of *Bandwagon* ever, symbolizing better than anything else the tremendous year this organization enjoyed in 1987. During the year we greatly enhanced our revenues, totally revamped the layout and design of *Bandwagon*, conducted another successful convention, and added more new members and published more pages than in any other year in our history.

3291 These remarkable achievements occurred solely because of the wonderful spirit of volunteerism which permeates our society. The membership responded in spades to the call for contributions at dues time as about 10% of the entire organization gave more than necessary to belong to the CHS.

3292 Equally essential was the hard work of Fred Pfening Jr. and Johann Dahlinger. Pfening purchased a complete computer editing system earlier this year and proceeded to spend endless hours teaching himself its mysteries. Dahlinger not only performed the mundane and time consuming duties of handling the society's administrative and financial affairs with her usual grace and good humor, but also took on the extra tasks of mailing out hundreds of brochures to prospective members and back issues to new members. Neither of them, nor any of the other officers, receive any financial remuneration for these invaluable services.

3293 The coming year promises to be another great one. I see no reason why we shouldn't continue to improve both the quality and quantity of the magazine, increase our membership, and enhance our revenues. A roster will appear in 1988, and the January-February issue will contain an announcement of next year's convention.

3294 May each of you have the happiest of holidays. My sincerest thanks for your fabulous support of this organization during the year. Fred Pfening III

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appropriate time after the election. Election results will be published in the January-February issue.

#### COMPUTER UPDATE

This massive issue has been quite a challenge. About six hours a day for the past month have gone into its publication. All of the articles have been keyed in on the trusty Macintosh.

Each issue since the May-June one has become a little easier, but learning additional softwear has taken time.

All of the heads have been set on Laser FX. SuperPaint has been used in this issue also. ReadySetGo 4, an upgrade, offers many features over the former softwear program. A SuperView 17" screen allows the copy to be seen double size. Using a new laser printer paper allows production crisp printouts of each page that go directly to the Middleton Printing Co., the fine company which has printed the *Bandwagon* for the last ten years.

The more professional appearance of the publication has made it all worthwhile.

## AVAILABLE BACK ISSUES OF **BANDWAGON**

1966-Jan.-Feb., Sept.-Oct.  
1967-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct., Nov.-Dec.  
1968-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1969-Jan.-Feb., July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1970-All but Sept.-Oct.  
1971-All but May-June.  
1972-1975-All available.  
1976-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1977-All but Mar.-Ap.  
1978-All available.  
1979-All but Nov.-Dec.  
1980-1987-All available.

Price is now \$2.75 each. Add .90 postage one issue, \$1.50, more than one issue. Please select substitutes in case we are out of any of above.

#### **BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES**

**2515 DORSET RD.  
COLUMBUS, OH 43221**

# CLYDE BEATTY COLE BROS.

Produced By and Under the Direction  
of  
John W. Pugh and E. Douglas Holwadel



# The 1955 Tour of RINGLING BROS. and BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS

By Bob Hasson

After leaving Ringling Bros. in mid-season of 1949 I never thought I would find myself on another circus again, let alone The Greatest Show on Earth. The 1954 season was my fourth on the Royal American Shows, the world's largest carnival, traveling on its own seventy car train. I was operating my side show and a few kiddie rides. The show was playing the last date of the season at the Louisiana State Fair in Shreveport when I received a call from an old acquaintance, Frank McClosky, general manager of the circus. He asked if I would be interested in operating the side show for the 1955 season and if so, I should contact him as soon as possible.

After storing my equipment in Tampa and resting at home in Sarasota a few days, I drove to Orlando where the circus was playing. In a couple of hours after our first greeting, Frank and I had come to terms which were very satisfactory. I drove to Tampa the following

**John Ringling North, president of the Greatest Show on Earth. Author's collection.**



**The author is pictured making an opening of the Ringling-Barnum side show during the 1955 season. Snake handler Senorita Carmen is at his right. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise noted.**

week and met with Carl Sedlmayr, Sr., and told him of my plans. He wasn't too happy to hear my news, but being the type of gentleman he was, he understood my strong desire to take on this new proposition.

We agreed I should lease my equipment to Dick Best who would operate the side show on the Royal American midway the coming season. I engaged a partner to operate the kiddie rides during my absence. I would still operate the side show during the Florida State Fair in Tampa to fulfill my agreement with the carnival.

I spent the next two months contacting acts and engaging people for the various positions on the Ringling-Barnum side show. I wasn't too happy with the lay out of the side show car and was given the okay and the man power from the carpenter shop to rearrange it to my satisfaction.

The troubles that were to lie ahead for the big show in 1955 began early. The

Billboard of January 29, 1955 carried an article headlined: "Ringling cuts billing 75% to favor TV movie, North accepts film man's plan stressing newspapers, TV reruns." The article reported all advertising procedures on the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus were changed that week by Milton Pickman, a movie promoter, who was close to John Ringling North. Pickman outlined a plan tied to the sale of a television show involving the circus. The plan, which received North's nod, virtually killed the show's outdoor advertising. It substituted a television plan and a newspaper campaign that would use revamped ad art from the movie, *The Greatest Show On Earth*.

Most Ringling people were grim and quiet about the results of several staff meetings. There were reports of argu-

**Michael Bailey Burke, executive director of Ringling-Barnum and a key player in the operation of the show during the 1955 season. Author's collection.**





**Frank McClosky, general manager of Ringling-Barnum until midseason 1955. Author's collection.**

ments during the sessions. The intra-mural battle over circus-style versus movie-style promotion was not settled at that point.

The outdoor advertising budget was slashed from \$300,000 in 1954 to only \$75,000 for the 1955 season. This cut the number of billposters to the lowest number in history. Only eight or nine men were to be used, compared to thirty-three in 1954 and thirteen at the previous low point, which was during Art Concello's reign as general manager. The amount of paper posted was to be cut in proportion.

Gone, in the new scheme, was the advance advertising rail car. Instead the Ringling billers would move by truck. For the first time since Ringling went on rails there would be no advance car on the road. The few billposters that would be used would be comparable to the small opposition brigades of the past. The bill car was to become a sleeper until Pickman scuttled the plans. The show was preparing to order new styles of lithographs to advertise major features. Now only stock paper on printers' shelves was to be used. It was to be the first time that major Ringling features would not be billed with special posters.

At the outset Pickman wanted to eliminate all billing and junk paper already printed. He also wanted to increase the amount of money available for television. F. Beverly Kelley, chief of Rin-

gling radio and TV publicity, refused to accept a larger budget, terming it unnecessary and came away with an amount comparable with 1954.

Apparently Pickman understood that Ringling TV, radio and newspaper advertising was placed through commercial advertising agencies. He indicated he expected to place such accounts with agencies with which he had dealings in the motion picture business.

Pickman's advertising plan called for the use of color in at least some instances. Ad layouts he submitted at the Sarasota conferences indicated a preference for film style ads at the expense of standard circus copy. These ads also revealed that he expected to use tremendously increased space in papers. Some observers said they doubted whether the show could afford such large color ads at the higher rates newspapers charged for space on the theater page.

A major factor in Pickman's revolution was the upcoming filming of a Ringling dress rehearsal for use on television with General Foods Corporation as the sponsor. This was to be the first time the show had permitted televising its performance.

Through Pickman the show sold its TV rights for \$100,000. He had already collected his ten percent commission on the deal. Another \$20,000 would be required by the expenses which the show had to cover under the terms of the contract, leaving no more than \$70,000 on the deal. The TV contract eliminated Merle Evans and the Ringling band in favor of a local group to be hired for the occasion. Ringling also had to pay for the extra help and for overtime wages not previously required in moving dirt into Madison Square Garden.

Two other clauses in the TV contract received sharp attention. One provided that ballyhoo for the televising of the show was to start a month before the televised opening. Thus the TV show would have wide advertising while Ringling would be arriving in New York with almost no outdoor advertising, but with revised newspaper ads and the usual TV and radio breaks.

The other surprise was that the contract reportedly provided that TV film of the dress rehearsal may also be used in any additional cities on the Ring-



**Noyelles Burkhart, Ringling-Barnum legal adjuster in 1955. He was the man most feared by union organizers.**

ling route sixty days ahead of the show's appearance in those towns. Thus a so-called TV filmed "giveaway" of the performance could also be shown in advance of all of the show's other stands throughout the season.

This was a sharp contrast to earlier provisions in which Paramount Pictures was prohibited from showing *The Greatest Show On Earth* in conflict with the routing of the real thing.

Another tie-in set by Pickman called for distribution of novelty hats through grocery stores, with the provision that they could be turned in at the Garden for reduced price childrens' tickets at the circus.

Apparently the changes would mean that there was to be no position with the advance for John Brassil, who had been manager of the advertising car. Fewer billers would be hired but other staffers with the show apparently would not be affected.

During the winter Edward J. Kno-blaugh, director of publicity for the circus, was at work in the winter quarters office, along with Charles J. Schuler, radio-TV agent.

John Ringling North called staff meetings originally for January 11 and he expected to stay in Sarasota for one day before going to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Pickman was delayed and the sessions were postponed for one, then two days. When Pickman arrived the fireworks began and the con-

ference extended over several days.

Frederick A. "Babe" Boudinot, general agent, was said to have spoken up sharply against the Pickman plan. It was his department that was to be most affected. His opposition continued throughout the sessions.

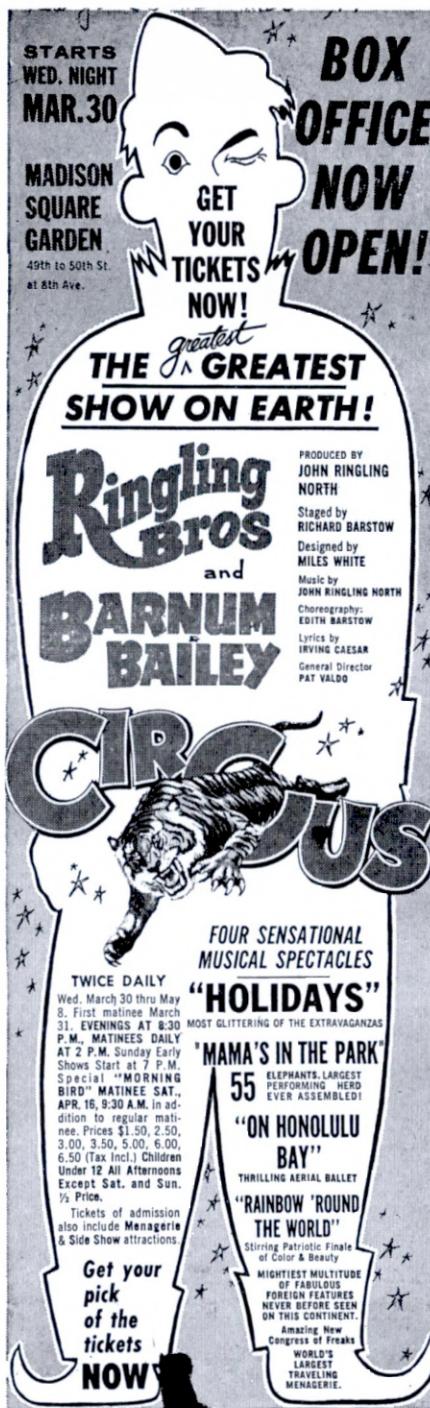
Bev Kelley, although his TV-radio publicity department stood to benefit by the changes, also spoke up in firm opposition to the Pickman proposals and was said to have stressed that the outdoor billing was one of the distinctive advertising media available to the circus business and that circus newspaper ads had a style all their own.

Pickman had traveled with the circus briefly at the end of the 1954 season, after North had named him special promotions director. He was reputed to have brought Cecil B. DeMille and North together for their initial movie contract and to have earned more than one million dollars in percentage arrangements for his effort. Pickman's brother was an executive with Paramount Pictures and it was through him that Pickman arranged with DeMille to suspend the DeMille-Ringling contract provision that the show could not be filmed or televised before 1960. Pickman's position on the circus was incidental to his work as president of a newly organized motion picture producing company.

The staff activities outlined above foretold the turmoil that the Ringling show was to go through during the 1955 season.

Real winter quarters activity started to get underway soon after the show returned from the engagement in Cuba, which had closed on January 9.

The February 5, 1955 *Billboard* reported that a new emphasis was being placed on the Ringling portion of the title. The article stated that as wagons and other equipment were being lettered the Ringling name was larger than the Barnum & Bailey portion. This was evident as more equipment was relettered. The change had been noted during the 1952 season. Officials of the show made no comment on why the change was begun, but some observers said that the Ringling family apparently decided to stress its part. There was speculation that ultimately the Barnum & Bailey part of the title might be dropped, but



This non-circus style newspaper ad is typical of the off-beat ads brought to the circus by Milton Pickman.

this was unlikely as it was still strong in much of the East.

Winter quarters work included enlargement of the show train and revamping of the menagerie. Ten cars were to be

added to the present seventy and the show would move at least part of the time in four sections. The ten additional cars were to include five flats. Whether there was to be two or three additional stock cars reportedly depended upon on how much space would be needed to carry all the new elephants in quarters at the time. The remainder of the cars were to be coaches.

The *Billboard* article continued with the information that in addition to the ten cars, the show was preparing to replace some others. Two new flats had been ordered from the Thrall Car Company of Chicago Heights, Illinois. Two old flats were being called back to duty that had the Hagenbeck-Wallace title visible under top paint. Another carried the Al G. Barnes title and a fourth had the John Robinson name visible. Several stock cars were being reworked. Two Barnes stock cars had been cut down for possible use as flats, and several other stock cars had been stripped down to the decking in preparation for rebuilding. One of these was said to have carried the Sparks title. Two car loads of lumber arrived in quarters to be used for decking the cars. Where the additional coaches were to come from was not certain, except that the former advance car would be converted.

The cage wagons were being painted a bright "cookhouse" green; they had been blue for several years. The cages would again be exhibited in a separate tent. Jungle effects were being painted on the cages.

The February 5 *Billboard* reported that Babe Boudinot had submitted his resignation as general agent and that Paul Eagles would replace him.

Boudinot quit minutes after returning to the quarters following a trip to Montreal. He announced he had no immediate plans other than to take a rest following an extended period of strenuous work. In ending his stay of exactly forty seasons with Ringling Bros., Boudinot said he had the highest regard for "the title on those cars."

Many on the show hated to see Boudinot go. His leaving was the first casualty of the season.

*Billboard* reported that there was puzzlement over the Ringling TV show. Benton & Bowles, the advertising agency handling the event for General

Foods, said there was a long list of unanswered questions about the production. The format had not as yet been decided. It was not known if it was to be a one or three ring layout. It was not known what acts would appear and an emcee had not been selected. Nor had a title for the production been established. A few things were known: it was to be a private performance, the public was to be excluded, and it would be broadcast on NBC from 8 to 9 PM.

The enlarged elephant herd, now at 55 or 56 head, was to be used in several spots in the new show. A menage number called "Strolling Through the Park" was to utilize all the clowns and include elephants outfitted to resemble humans. The finale was to be called "Rainbow 'Round the World." The aerial ballet number would have the girls playing tom-toms. Miles White was making elephant props. Richard and Edith Barstow would stage the productions which would use John Ringling North music.

The admission prices would remain about the same, with a scale of \$1.50 for general admission up to \$6.50 for choice reserves. Children were to again be admitted for half price every afternoon except Saturday and Sundays. The New York stand would be from March 30 to May 8, a total of seventy-nine performances, two less than were given in 1954.

By the end of February there was plenty of activity in winter quarters and the results could be seen. The outdoor arena shows were drawing large crowds since being started in mid-January. Attendance on February 20 totaled 8,000. Gate admission was 75 cents per adult. Manager Willis E. Lawson was spotted directing jammed traffic three blocks from the entrance after the show broke. The entrance to quarters had been rebuilt and the buildings repainted.

Robert "Smokey" Jones had been named superintendent of elephants, replacing Eugene "Arky" Scott. The show

bought another baby elephant bringing the total to 56. Hugo Schmitt still continued with the elephant acts. Rehearsals were underway daily under the direction of Richard and Edith Barstow, Bob Dover and Pat Valdo.

The show put on a big ballyhoo about it importing an Okapi. The rare



Merle Evans and his 25 man band posed in Madison Square Garden in the spring of 1955.

animal was to be a feature in the new revised menagerie as soon as it was released from quarantine following its arrival from the zoo in Hamburg, Germany. (The story of the Ringling Okapi is told in an article by Richard J. Reynolds III in the March-April 1987 *Bandwagon*.)

Big news came in the March 26 *Billboard* when it was announced Michael Bailey Burke, former advisor to the U. S. high commissioner in Germany for four years, had been named executive director of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and was to represent John Ringling North on the show. Burke advised that his post had been quite clearly defined as being second only to North and that he expected to spend most of the summer traveling with the show. Burke was also to handle North's oil and real estate properties. At the time North expected to go

to Europe in June for a stay of several months. Henry Ringling North would be on the show from time to time throughout the year.

Burke said he was a free-lance movie writer before World War II. While in the Navy and OSS he met Henry North and that they had been friends since. After

the war Burke was a contract writer for Warner Bros. Pictures and then went to Rome for another film company before going on to Germany. He advised that he had met John and Henry North several times in Europe and was first approached about the current position about eighteen months earlier. Burke said that he did not know Milton Pickman, but they had met on the show in 1954.

I would like to say a few words about Michael Burke. He may have been resented by some in the management area and this could be expected because of him being a "First of

May" in the circus business. In his defense I would have to say that I found him to be a top rate gentleman with impeccable taste in his wardrobe and manners that brought class to his position. Although I may not have agreed with certain decisions that he made, I respected him for his honesty and frankness. At one time, during a meeting of the staff, I recall him saying, "I may not know very much about the circus business but for the money I'm being paid, I'm more than willing to learn." After his tenure with the circus Burke went on to become president of Madison Square Garden and on to a top management post with the New York Yankee ball club.

Stories were published in the *Billboard* that were sometimes off base. One appeared in the March 26 issue. It stated that the big show would again have an air conditioned big top. General manager Frank McClosky was reported to have said that six air conditioners would be carried, each with an eighty ton capacity. The set up was to utilize Chrysler Airtemp equipment



**The short cages that had been converted from Army ammunition wagons were painted with a jungle design in 1955.**

which had been assembled in Lakeland, Florida and mounted on trucks.

The new system was to cool only the seating areas of the big top, not the entire tent. Air was to be forced in at the sides of the tent, rather than through the top, as with the earlier system. The cool air was to come in over the seats wagons and be drawn out from under the seats. Plans called for placing one unit at each end of the top and two units at each side. Two of the units were suppose to be already at quarters.

From 1939 through 1942 the show carried eight air cooling units, but they were not wholly satisfactory. They used ice, which was not always available.

Another article in that issue reported that Ringling-Barnum was to close its Chicago office on March 31, and that its operations were to be handled in Sarasota thereafter. It would be the first time in well over a half-century that the show had not had a Chicago office. Nat Green, manager of the office, said he had not finalized his future plans.

The office, used primarily by the general agents as headquarters for making railroad contracts and shipping dated advertising material to the bill car, had been opened by John Ringling. The site was chosen because of the number of railroad and printing companies in Chicago.

For years the office was in space provided at show printing company facilities. Ringling dates were still to be printed in Chicago, but this season the order had been sharply curtailed in keep-

ing with the decision to use a minimum of outdoor advertising.

In closing the office the show gave up a special arrangement by which it saved \$10,000 to \$12,000 annually on dates shipped from Chicago. The system dated back to around 1902. One of the previous office managers was Dan DeBaugh, another was Ralph Peckham. After leaving printing company space the show had an office at 155 North Clark Street and since 1949 it was located at 139 North Clark in a general office building. During the tenure of Waldo Tupper as general agent, the show discontinued its New York office and combined its activities with those in Chicago. Meanwhile Harry Dube, publisher of the show's program, had been using the space formerly used by the show in New York.

All circus office business was to be handled in Sarasota. A year-round office was set up in order to handle accounting and bookkeeping for the federal government's withholding taxes.

Final arrangements concerning the TV show were announced. The hour long show would carry more circus acts than any TV show seen to date. At least a dozen acts would be on the program, plus part of a spec and an elephant finale. The program was to be built around a discussion between John Ringling North and commentator John Daly. The line up acts was to be: Paul Fritz, lions; clown interview; Miss Mara, trapeze; Les Renellys, double trapeze; Logano, aerial contortionist; Rixos, unsupported ladders; Antoinette Bisiini, trapeze; Delia Canestrelli, rolling globe; clown walk-a-round; Pinito Del Oro, trapeze balancing; Loyal's liberty horses; Gina Caroli interview with



**Property wagon No. 61 illustrated the enlarged size of the Ringling name in the title.**

M'Toto, gorilla; interview with Josephine Berosini; Flying Palacios; Unis, finger stand; Berosini, high wire; Three Nocks, sway pole; and acrobats on all rings and stages.

The finale was to be the fifty-five elephant herd, with a long mount. Bill Ballantine was to be the technical director. Music was to be provided by Merle Evans and the circus band, contrary to earlier reports that a local group would be used.

On March 26 it was announced that veteran publicist William Fields, who had aided the Ringling show in publicizing its Madison Square Garden date for many years, had resigned because of the newly instituted advertising policy.

Fields wired his resignation to John Ringling North in Florida. He told the *Billboard* he resigned "because of a fundamental disagreement with a particular part of the policies recently instituted by management."

The circus took a different view. Although all officials contacted refused comment, one spokesman, voicing regret, said Fields' departure was occasioned by his being busy with four hit theater shows on Broadway which had deprived him of the necessary time he would have to devote to the circus.

Fields, one of the most successful press agents of Broadway shows, was one of a few considered expert enough to function in the dual role of a circus agent, had had a hit show on Broadway practically without interruption for years. Union rules specified the addition of agents when a publicist adds shows

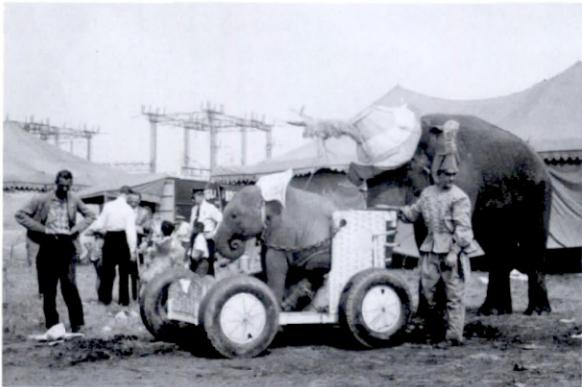


**Paul Fritz and his lion act opened the 1955 Ringling performance.**

to his current activities. Promotion chief Milton Pickman had told the press staffers that they would have to accomplish their chores with a considerably smaller allotment of complimentary press tickets.

Initial reports said that Pickman had cut the ducats available for the press in half. A twenty-five percent cut was made about two years before. The reports advised that complimentary passes in New York, as well as many other cities, were practically worth their weight in gold. The agents were constantly deluged with requests, many from people difficult to turn down in view of their importance in controlling written and spoken words. Staffers estimated that several years prior as many as 10,000 free ducats had been used to publicize the New York stand alone. While somewhat an awesome figure it is easier to understand when it is remembered that

**This baby elephant "carriage" was in the "Mama's in the Park" elephant number in 1955.**



many could be charged off to the season's work activity as a whole since this city was the center of newspaper and wire services, magazine editorial offices and radio and television networks.

Kenneth Mayo, a former Associated Press representative and New York *World-Telegram* feature writer, was added for the New York stand. Mayo helped in preparing advance material in winter quarters. He was not to be used on the road.

In his book, *Outrageous Good Fortune*, published in 1984, Michael Burke tells of the financial condition of the circus in the spring of 1955 as it was about to head for the New York opening. He said he was jolted to find what a difficult job he had ahead with the circus. The show was one million dollars in debt in spite of grossing six million dollars a year. Income from the sale of motion picture rights for *The Greatest Show on Earth* had barely kept the show afloat. When he arrived in quarters he found there was only \$3,000 in the checking account, and that was it. The \$100,000 fee from NBC for the television show covered some of the pressing bills. He reported that the circus borrowed \$40,000 from Madison Square Garden against the advance ticket sale to get the show to New York.

The spring special of the *Billboard*, dated April 9, 1955 provided an extensive report by Jim McHugh of the New York opening. The following is not the full text, but gives the flavor of the new show.

"The eye-filling spectacle liberally peppered with pure circus talent marked the unfolding of the 1955 edition of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in Madison Square Garden on March 30. The performance was a believable and better and bigger presentation of the Greatest Show on Earth, despite the fact that there is less emphasis on newness than in any other year in the recent past. There is a full measure of thrills from the opening

wild animal displays to the concluding breathtaking exhibition of the Nervous Nocks. The principal thrillers were all there a year ago, with the exception of sure-footed Takeo Usui, who scampers up and down a rope anchored to the floor and the top balcony with unbelievable ease. Some like Unis and Pinito Del Oro, can measure their services with the big show in years.

"The ingredients for a successful tour are there in profusion. There is a feeling that the public will love the John Ringling North production while being largely unaware that the presentation is a close facsimile of that of last year. There is evidence that a record run might be in the offing for the forty day showing. New selling techniques, involving more newspaper space and fewer posters, probably resulted in a record million dollar advance sale.

"The opening staged for the Arthritis and Rheumatism Foundation drew possibly the biggest and best grossing preem audience in the history of the show, with every seat in the Garden filled. The wealthy and the famous filled the most expensive pews, and for a solid hour stage, film and video personages, headed by the curvaceous Marilyn Monroe on a pink elephant, helped populate one of the principal specs.

"The show on opening night ran from 8:30 to 1:00 AM, including an estimated hour given over to the appearance of personalities. This would allow a three and a half hour preem effort of the circus performance itself. The usual tightening up job appeared to be relatively simple for director Pat Valdo.

"The performance went off with notable smoothness despite a difficult rehearsal period which was broken up by the considerable work needed to produce the coast-to-coast televising of the circus features on the 29th. This delayed start of the first dress rehearsal until 10:15 PM, on the same night. This session ran until 3:00 AM and work resumed at 11:00 AM, continuing through much of the afternoon.

"The parade numbers rank with the best ever produced by the circus. No other live show presentation anywhere even comes close to equalling them. The principal production number, 'Holidays' fills the arena with color and fantasy in motion. St. Patrick's Day

was noted by rotund Keystone Irish cops, for April Fool's Day there was a tremendous dragon and a flying saucer, a bunny and eggs were included on a massive float in the Easter display. Independence Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas were represented by floats.

"A second spec, 'Mama's in the Park,' placed emphasis on personnel and bulls. Beautiful pageantry was created for the final and closing spectacle, 'Rainbow 'Round the World,' with music bearing the same title written by John Ringling North and Irving Caesar. As colorful as a rainbow, the display featured the ballet riding the track on hobby horses with the beautifully costumed band of Merle Evans in the center ring. Three large rainbow colored balls were raised above the rings. Girls performed iron jaw routines beneath each for a rousing finale. This display was a welcome relief from the flag waving and President's portrait displays with their expected red, white and blue motifs that have been used with a monotonous regularity in recent years.

"The aerial ballet was highlighted again in 'On Honolulu Bay,' with the imitable Pinito Del Oro featured over the center ring on the swinging trapeze. Del Oro made her entrance on a bamboo carrier. Thirty-six girls worked web with an equal number of attendants and eleven Oriental hula girls on the track. Except for the Hawaiian costuming, the display was a facsimile of all aerial ballet efforts of the recent past."

The performance was as follows on opening night. This order of acts was somewhat revised later, and does not correspond with the listing in the printed program.

1. The show opened with Trevor Bale in the center ring with seven tigers. Paul Fritz worked seven lions in one end ring and Walter Stone handled seven bears in the other.

2. A clown walk-a-round.

3. Miss Mara, single trapeze; The Renelleys, aerial hand voltige; the Geraldos, double traps; Logano and Delia Canestrelli, aerial contortionists; the Rixos and Antoinette Bisbini.



**The Valentine's Day float used in the Holidays spec of the 1955 Ringling show.**

4. A clown baseball number.
5. Three wire acts, Attalina, Tonito and Luis Munoz.
6. A dressage display with Alexander Konyot in the center ring, and Marion Seifert and Nadia Houcke in the end rings.
7. On Honolulu Bay aerial number featuring Pinito Del Oro.
8. Clown number.
9. Liberty drills, with Czeslaw Mroczkowski, his wife Gina and Hans Ussi, each with twelve horses.
10. Unis, one finger equilibrist, in the center ring.
11. Dog act with Octave De Jonghe, Alphonze De Jonghe with chimps, Marion Seifert and ponies.
12. Justino Loyal riding act, in center ring, with Ilonka and Evy Karoly in the end rings.
13. A variety of ground acts. Marilex, plate spinners; Adanas, juggler; Oliveras, horizontal bars; Cupers, unicycles and Superbas, jugglers.

**The Merle Evans band appeared in the center ring as a part of the finale of the 1955 performance.**



cycles and Superbas, jugglers.

14. Josephine Berosini on the high wire.

15. Holidays spec, followed by an intermission.

16. Flying trapeze acts with the Palacios over the center ring. The Sabre Jets and Clayton Beehee's Falcons over the end rings.

17. Clown number.

18. Rope and whip acts with the Charros, the Cordon and Marion Seifert.

19. Takeo Usui climbs a rope backwards to the balcony and ascends on his seat.

20. The Naukos, unicycle act; Burton and Son, hand balancing; Evy and Everta, cycle act; Fenix-Ferroni Duo, rolling globes and the Radinos, unicycles on stairs.

21. Mama's in the Park elephant number.

22. Acrobatic display. Yong Brothers; Fredonias, risley; Abbott Sisters, tumblers; Four Whirlwinds, tumblers; Seguras, springboard and the Nocks, sway poles.

23. Clown production number.

24. Rainbow 'Round the World finale.

Credits for the show went to John Ringling North, producer; staging by Richard Barstow; designed by Miles White; general director, Pat Valdo; music by John Ringling North; lyrics by Irving Caesar; production coordinator Ralph Allen; choreography by Edith Barstow; Merle Evans, musical director; Robert Dover, equestrian director; Count Nicholas, ringmaster; orchestrations by Samuel Grossman; Harold Ronk, vocalist and Doug Morris, lighting.

Even though one may not have had the opportunity to be in the Garden to take it all in, McHugh's comments on the performance will attest to the fact that it was a great show and take it from me, it certainly was. I am very glad that I could have been a part of it.

The day after the opening performance Jim McHugh visited with me in the basement of the Garden during the matinee come-in. The result of his visit was an article in the April 16 *Billboard*. In print he reported that thirteen acts were be-

ing presented in the Ringling side show in the basement of Madison Square Garden, and that three more would join when the show opened under canvas in Baltimore. He stated, "Acts assembled by manager Bobby Hasson are virtually all new or returns this season, with the exception of only three holdovers from 1954, the midget Doll family, snake handler Senorita Carmen and armless-legless girl Frieda Pushnik."

Other kid show attractions included Johan Petursson, giant; Molay, juggler, returning after four years; Nabor Felez, American Indian clay modeling, returning after eight years; Ricky Richiardi, sword swallower; Milan, pincushion; David Naeole, returning with a seven person Hawaiian troupe after being with the show in 1952; Sadie Anderson, leopard skin girl, returning after thirteen years. Other attractions included Alvino Masto, eye poper; Francis Duggan, contortionist and Glen Pulley, thin man. The acts to join in Baltimore were Great Maurice, magic; James Pearson, sword ladder and Don James, Bohemian glass blower. James was coming back after six years absence.

Lecturers were Maurice Jouron and Walter Paul. On the road ticket sales were to be handled by Al Lombardi, Mike Bergan, Charles Christian and Whitey Savage. Savage was to share the outside talker's chores with me.

A notable event of the Garden run was the marriage of Emmett Kelly to Elveria Gebhardt (now Mrs. John Lentz), one of the Four Whirlwinds acrobatic troupe. The wedding garnered a lot of free press that was more than welcome and was needed as business at the Garden dropped off sharply following the peak Easter period.

Another newsy item, during the New York stand, was the abandonment of all half price ducats for kids starting with the under canvas run in Baltimore on May 17. All seats were to be reserved, including the blues. The new price scale was to be \$1.50, \$2.00, \$2.50, \$3.50

and \$4.00. All track ticket boxes were to be eliminated except for one that allowed changes to be made for better seats.

The circus ended its New York stand on a very happy note racking up a total gross in excess of two million dollars. It was the highest ever for this date although previous engagements came near this mark. The show also received word before its Garden closing that the advance in Boston, the next date, was tremendous.

The end of the Garden stand on May 8 was also the end of a five year contract between the show and the Garden. Negotiations had been going on but nothing had been settled. James Norris, Madison Square Garden president, and Ned Irish of the Garden staff had been approached by Art Concello about



**The steel arena wagon No. 31 is pictured outside the big top in 1955.**

bringing in another show to replace Ringling, but nothing had developed.

A negative development for all of outdoor show business in the May 28, 1955 *Billboard* reported that Harry Karsh was making another attempt to unionize carnivals, this time through the Carnival and Allied Workers Union 447, St. Louis, chartered by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and a part of the Jewelry Workers union. In 1952 Karsh had organized fewer than a dozen shows before the charter was cancelled following action by the American Federation of Labor. At the time George F. Meany said that the organization of carnival workers was outside the natural jurisdiction of the Jewelry Workers, represented by Karsh. Meany commented that carnival work was

highly seasonal and it was difficult to determine the status of people engaged in this business.

The initial target of Karsh in his 1955 unionizing attempt was the Royal American Shows, the largest carnival and the first to be organized by him in 1952. While he was concentrating on the Royal, owners of other shows were not idle. Some consulted lawyers to be briefed on the rights of employers and employees. Owners of other carnivals urged show owners to put up vigorous and determined resistance to Karsh.

At its second stand in Boston the Ringling show broke a record with a total gross of \$275,000 which was ten percent better than the previous year's figure. During the Boston engagement George Blood, superintendent of the dining department, died at age 52 in his hotel room on May 14. Blood had been with Ringling for thirty-one years. He had joined the show in 1923 working for Ollie Webb. Webb died in 1937 and Blood took over the dining department.

During the opening under canvas stand in Baltimore business was very brisk, drawing four strong turnouts for the two days. For the first time in several years the show erected a separate menagerie tent which was used regularly throughout the season. Also new was a line up at the front door of five ticket wagons, one for each price ticket. The previous year the show had used four wagons, including one for passes. In 1955 the passes were exchanged at a folding booth. The fifth wagon was an old office wagon that was reactivated. The only inside ticket box was spotted near the connection. It replaced the inside string of ticket stands that formerly were placed around the hippodrome track. A staff of girl ushers was used, although there were also some male ushers.

In the June 4 *Billboard* word came about the ill fated air conditioning units. The units had failed to appear at the road opening and it was stated that the idea had been dropped at least until the following season.

It was now clear that the show's okapi, in quarantine in the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., would not be released for at least a year. Earlier it had been expected that the unusual animal would be released after a few weeks, and

had in fact been listed in the circus' newspaper ads in New York.

On June 11 the show received word that an adult male hippo, a baby African elephant and two Grevy zebras were on the way from Africa. Six dromedaries were also expected from Australia.

Two young African rhinos had been imported in the spring and were on the show. They had been named Bill and Lill. Henry North had named them after a pair of Indian rhinos that were on the Barnum & Bailey show. Missing from the menagerie was Lotus, the hippo, who had come to Ringling from the Barnes show in 1938. The animal had died in winter quarters during the winter.

A female hippo named Chester (having been born in Chester, Pennsylvania) had been in the menagerie for a number of years.

In early July there was word in trade publications that the Madison Square Garden might produce its own circus. After a thirty-three year relationship with Ringling the building was considering the production of its own sawdust spectacle. It appeared that there was dissatisfaction on both sides. The Garden was reported to not be happy with the \$400,000 rental. John Ringling North said he was not happy with the net of \$100,000 the show left town with in the spring. The remaining \$1,200,000 presumably had been used in production, staging, advertising and operating costs. There was suggestion that the show was looking into leasing the parking lot of the Polo Grounds, home of the New York Giants, in the Bronx.

By June the union had found his way to the Ringling-Barnum circus. During the tear down in Providence, Rhode Island, on June 17, the tractor boss found that two of his tractors had been tampered with by placing a foreign substance in the fuel tanks. The following morning in Newport as side show wagon No. 10 was being unloaded it was discovered that the tarpaulin covering it was full of holes caused by acid. It was assumed that the acid was thrown from an overhead bridge that the train passed under during the early morning hours. Apparently the intended victim was the big top canvas that was loaded in an open top truck and in the dimly lit morning sky the side show wagon was mistaken for the truck.

The first mention of any union strife on the show appeared in the July 16 *Billboard* and it dealt with the press department. A vigorous protest against contemplated press department changes

Oliver said when he learned Kelley was leaving he sent the show a list of available qualified union press agents, for the department, but there had been no reply. Union press agents on the show



**A fifth ticket wagon was used for the first time in 1955. The former office wagon is at the left.**

had been filed by the Association of Theatrical Agents and Managers, AFL. The union's telegram to executive director Michael Burke and promotion chief Milton Pickman prompted the show to announce that the circus might have "to look elsewhere for new blood" if its present staff was not versatile enough to assume the responsibilities of press, radio and TV publicity.

The union emphasized that relations with the show had been good through the years, but that the 1955 contract, signed by general manager Frank McClosky, flatly stated that the show would employ only union press agents. The union advised that it understood that there were non-union publicity men and press apprentices currently on the show. Radio and TV agent F. Beverly Kelley had left the show. The union had asked him to be shop steward and had been informed he may be leaving. Allen Lester was named steward instead.

Hal Oliver, business agent, said the union had no complaints about the abolishing of Kelley's job in merging of Ringling press departments, since a contract clause provided for two weeks' notice to be given at any time by management or workers. He added there was no concern about non union press department chief Ed Knoblaugh, "so long as he didn't make any papers."

were Kelley, Eddie Johnson, Frank Braden, Allen Lester and Eddie Howe.

Early in July the show was in Ohio doing spotty business. Aside from television, veterans on the show attributed the lack of business to the absence of half priced children's tickets. Also mentioned was the absence of solid old time circus billing, especially 24 sheet billboards.

A rumor was circulating concerning the momentary closing of the show. The local Associated Press man was alerted by his Cleveland office that the show was expected to close at the end of its Cincinnati run on July 17. Contacted in New York, Milton Pickman ridiculed the suggestion of the big show folding in Cincinnati, or anywhere before the end of the season.

Another rumor had the show folding after its week long run in Chicago on July 31, and moving to Sarasota to chuck its heavier equipment, including most of the train flats, the canvas and the seats, before hitting the road for Mexico City for an indefinite stand at the Amphitheater there. Ringling executives denied that such plans were in the making, while admitting that a possible Mexico City engagement had been mulled for some time, they said such an engagement would not come before the end of the current canvas season.

Representatives of the Retail Clerks Industrial Association, Local 1648, AFL, New York, headed by union organizer Joseph Kane, picketed the show at all the Ohio stands. Kane was a former



**Cookhouse range wagons No. 3 and 7 are shown in the cook tent during the 1955 season.**

Ringling usher and ticket taker. Kane set up a five man picket line on the lot in Cincinnati and had a lone picket parading before the downtown ticket office. The picketing went almost unnoticed and had little effect on ticket sales.

Kane planned to organize the show's working men, ushers and ticket takers, and claimed he already had 430 signatures. He told the *Billboard* in Cincinnati that he had been negotiating with the show executives for the past six weeks without coming to any agreement. A new contract had been presented to Michael Burke in Mansfield on July 14. The contract was a virtual duplicate of the one recently accepted by the James E. Strates carnival, but it was rejected.

Henry North joined the circus in Cincinnati after being gone for four weeks. John Ringling North, who was to have departed on a European jaunt, was reported to have postponed the trip indefinitely.

When John North issued his orders that the curtailment of passes to newspaper people and city officials along the route, it created problems for the show. I remember an incident in Dayton, Ohio while the circus flats were being unloaded. Two of the D-6 Cat tractors were always required to travel to the lot from the runs on their own as the show had only one low-boy wagon for the third D-6. Although the two Cats were equipped with rubber "street plates," the drivers tried to avoid police detection by taking side streets and alleys. The show was ticketed that day for infractions that it was never bothered

with before. As a result of all the delays, the afternoon performance was late in starting. I think from this occurrence, John North realized that he was operating just another circus as far as the city officials were concerned, even if it

was the Greatest Show on Earth. The usual number of passes might have made the difference.

As the circus headed for Chicago at the end of July the show re-examined its pass and advertising policies. While making the changes show officials repeatedly denied rumors of financial difficulties. They declared that business had been spotty but sometimes good. The policy changes were interpreted as a tacit recognition that all was not smooth within the circus. John Ringling North's decision to stay with the show rather than go to Europe was also due to problems on the show. But show brass declared that discontent on the show was due to management's efforts to stamp out minor practices to which it objected. The staffers said there had been no financial trouble, although business had been somewhat short of what was anticipated. This, they said, was because money was tighter. Turnstiles continued in operation at the front door, curtailing any cash entry not reported to the show. But modification of the stiff door rules now allowed for one exit lane.

One of the policy changes was the purchase of 24 sheet billboard space in stands following Chicago. The number of passes for newspapers was returned to last year's level in Chicago. Prior to this the quotas had been cut from 50 to 70 percent, although the circus management had consistently denied that there

was any reduction in passes given for "justified" reasons. The Chicago change came after newspaper editors in several Ohio cities had told of dissatisfaction and that future stands in their towns would be given only routine coverage. In a last minute move the Ringling show bought space on elevated and subway station platforms for two and three sheet posters and on buses for exterior cards.

As part of the commercial arrangement with General Foods there were numerous outdoor billboard panels printed with Birdseye Foods' "Circus of Values," but as elsewhere there was no mention of the Ringling name.

Henry Ringling North scotched a rumor that he and his brother had argued over show policies. He did confirm that he had not always agreed with this year's actions and had argued against some. He said 1955 had been set up from the outset as a year of change for the show, and that several innovations were being tried and that any which failed would be altered or dropped. But North also pointed out that changes from obsolete methods were necessary if the circus was to continue successfully.

The Chicago run was poor and for the first of the fourteen performances the show went through formalities for an audience of about 1800 placed in 9700 seats. Dissension and low morale which had dogged the show all season showed no sign of letting up in the Windy City.

The \$4.00 top ticket was abandoned at the end of the Chicago stand. Start-

**Light plant wagon No. 2 supplied power for the 1955 Ringling dining department.**



ing in Beloit, Wisconsin on August 1 the highest priced ducat was \$3.00. The adult ticket for general admission bleacher seats went to \$1.50 and if there was a child in the group tickets were one dollar for both adults and children.

The low morale and the small crowds left many employees with concern about the show's future. Groups of working men and butchers had been arguing about whether to stay with the show as it headed west. Performances were uninspired for the most part, with many performers losing interest because of small attendance.

Timekeepers Joseph Dunn and William Webster left in Chicago and show police chief Williams left on July 30. Lloyd Morgan, lot superintendent, was away from the show but was expected back in Wisconsin. His assistant Bill Dwyer had left sometime before.

Ralph Allen, production coordinator of the performance in New York, was assigned to television and press work. A decision by Milton Pickman cancelled the purchase of radio time for one day stands.

A truck was painted and equipped to carry two of the baby elephants ahead of the show as a bally. Scheduled to make the early Wisconsin stands, it was still in Chicago near the end of the stand.

The Chicago Show Printing Company, which had a large amount of Ringling outdoor advertising paper on its shelves, began legal action against the show to recover the price of the paper. This move came because the show paid for paper as it was used and this year it was using none of most varieties and sizes.

Picketing of the show by a group of former ushers led by Joe (Killer) Kane continued in Chicago but with little noticed affect. Kane said that union and Ringling attorneys had met with a National Labor Relations Board representative in New York, with the union seeking recognition as bargaining agent, but no decision had been reached.

A late change in newspaper ads in Chicago mentioned that tickets were available at the show grounds. Earlier in the stand there was mention only of the advance and downtown sales plus stress

on the fact that all seats were reserved. The public had been confused that seats were expensive and probably sold out.

While most attention was centered on the current situation, some of the officials were reporting plans for next season and beyond. Some said that Kaiser Aluminum Company experts were working on a way to roof the Polo Grounds. It was suggested that Chrysler Airtemp engineers said it could be heated. John Ringling North spoke of revived plans for the building of a poleless big top that would be an improvement on the Gargantua top, but the same principal. Florida newspapers were reporting a show announcement of plans for major construction at winter quarters. Detailed plans for the following year's performance usually were laid out during the Chicago stand but the job seemed delayed this year.

The show played Beloit, Madison and LaCrosse, Wisconsin before heading to St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. The show world was stunned by news reported in the August 13 *Billboard*. General manager Frank McClosky, manager Willis E. Lawson and assistant manager Walter Kernan had been fired. Immediately after the executives severed their connection with the show at St. Paul on August 4, property boss Robert Reynolds quit. With him went four assistant bosses and about thirty property men. Subsequently, about a dozen others left. When the prop men failed to show up to remove the animal arenas after the first act of the night performance, the show was cancelled. Michael Burke told the audience ticket money would be refunded.

John Ringling North immediately named Lloyd Morgan as the new manager. Through Burke, North announced that the post of general manager was abolished and that a new assistant manager, lot superintendent and property boss would be named within forty-eight hours. Morgan had been away from the

show for several days prior to the St. Paul stand.

After the cancellation of the St. Paul night show, working men in several departments sat idle in the big top for some time, but several other departments were in full operation. Elephants were taken to the cars as usual, as were the horses. There was no immediate effort to load the show equipment, and



**Author Bob Hasson is shown in the ticket box of the 1955 Ringling side show.**

the organization lay inactive in a heavy rainstorm for about two hours.

Noyelles Burkhart, show legal adjuster, and North appeared in the big top, and Burkhart rallied the workingmen into action. Some men, however, remained idle. I feel Burkhart deserves a lot of credit for taking the chaotic situation in hand. He sent word to the train for the ring stock boss to return to the lot with his men. Only when they arrived along with some of the performers did things start to move. The ringstock boss had worked under Burkhart when the latter was manager of the Cole Bros. Circus.

The real reason McClosky, Lawson and Kernan were fired was that North was against the crap games in the band top during the performances and down at the different sections of the train at night. North told McClosky his feelings at the start of the season and was under the impression they had been stopped. When North changed his plans about going to Europe and returned to the show in Chicago, he learned that the gambling was still going on and he made plans for the three executives to



**The blacksmith wagon No. 9 on a lot during the 1955 season.**

be discharged. Reynolds had no reason to stay on since he was also part of the syndicate. A "meeting at the summit" had been talked of in Chicago, and a showdown session by various top officials was anticipated. After several delays the principals met on July 30 in Chicago but no decision was reached. McClosky said at the time North had asked him to go back to the lot and that his arrival would help morale at the time.

The show train made the short move to Minneapolis and all working departments were in full operation during the setup. Some property men began returning to work.

Although the show had only a ten mile move to Minneapolis the afternoon show was late because most of the rigging was a mess after being gathered by inexperienced people the night before. It took most of the morning to untangle it. The afternoon show on the second day in Minneapolis began at 2:25. The animal acts were omitted because of the problem of handling the steel arenas, but a tiger act went on that night. North was on the lot in Minneapolis.

The departure of the three executives was an extension of the tension which had been building up for some time, particularly since prior to the Chicago stand. Reynolds quitting was linked to that. Inaction of his assistants and men was seen as a sympathy move. There was no so-called labor problem, or any connection with the union.

McClosky later made a statement. He said that following the Chicago meeting

no further action was taken until about 8:00 PM in St. Paul, where he and the other fired executives met with Burke, who told them North had come to a decision. McClosky, Lawson and Kernan then handed Burke their prepared resignations. Reynolds learned of this and quit.

McClosky said the timing had been poor and that it left no course for him and the others except to leave then. It was his opinion that performers and others would have been willing to double in brass at the time in order to give a performance and that the meeting might have been held at a later hour. McClosky said he and Kernan would go fishing for two weeks and then go to Sarasota. They had plans for starting an auto thrill show in Europe and Kernan might go there soon.

In a trade publication Michael Burke reported his side of the story. He said that the group met, that North fired the three and that they produced their resignations. Burke said he would remain executive director and he then announced the appointment of Lloyd Morgan as well as the decision to do away with the post of general manager and that the series of changes were made "for the good of the company." He stated that bosses and department heads remained loyal to the show, and that no policies were to change. After a one or two day shake-down he felt all new appointments would be made.

The four assistant property bosses, Glen Wade, Tommy Clark, Chuck White and Ray Olech, could return to their jobs if they cared to, Burke said. He stated that all of the thirty prop men could go back to work and that six of them had already done so.

Burke said that business for the show had been good and that the recent Chicago run also earned good business. In statements to the press in the Twin Cities North charged that the discharged men had been more interested in privileges than in the show. They denied

any connection with setups he described.

After nearly thirty years Michael Burke reflected on the Minneapolis situation in his book. Prior to the show getting to Chicago he had learned about what he called the "Sneeze Mob." He defined the group as the people on the show who controlled the rackets like dice, whiskey and beer. North had told him to clean up the rackets, but failed to tell him that the general manager was the Chief Sneeze. Burke said he had no problems with Frank McClosky, however he later learned that Deacon Blanchfield had been primed by McClosky to ridicule him as a know nothing first of May. Burke learned that "Hamburger Jack" Burslem, head porter on the train had taken fifteen hundred cases of beer aboard the train in Philadelphia to be sold to the show people at a five hundred percent profit. The dice and the whiskey systems were tied to the ushers and ticket exchangers. The price of a seat in the blues was one dollar. If a patron wanted a better seat he could go to an exchange booth on the track and purchase a reserved seat at an additional charge. However the ushers were moving people into the reserves and pocketing the money. This was overlooked as long as the ushers took part in the gambling in the "blue room." It was there that the Sneeze relieved them of their take. A Miami gambler named Jimmy Blue Eyes had one of his men on the show to make sure that the games were favorable to those in charge.

Another scheme was the printing of duplicate tickets. It became apparent to Burke that there were more people in the big top than had purchased tickets at the wagon. It was time for Burke to call John Ringling North to the show to clamp down on all the money leaks. This brought about the Chicago conference and the blowup in Minneapolis.

The show stated that it was having record business with the two days in Minneapolis and a recent record was set for the afternoon only performance in Mankato. The show was planning on making big jumps getting to the west coast. A week later Ringling-Barnum was in Denver, Colorado. This two day stand on August 12 and 13 brought strong houses.

There were reports that morale was strong and there had been good operating efficiency on the lot on the long moves and that business had been good.

A 613 mile run put the show in Salt Lake City, where business was reported as good. Through the week the show was making jumps of 149, 212, 120 and 257 miles and played afternoons only in Idaho Falls and Missoula. The show played Spokane on August 20 and 21.

There had been no important change in the amount of outdoor advertising used by the show. However in San Francisco it bought space on one hundred fifty six-sheet boards in addition to the usual schedule for the year. Some extra billing had been done in Portland and Seattle where there was opposition from Polack Bros. Circus.

It was announced that the Ringling show would play seven days over two weekends in Los Angeles. The lot there at Rodeo and West Jefferson was the same one used the prior two years.

The San Francisco stand at the Cow Place, September 2 to 5, brought the show its first taste of union opposition. The circus began its four day run with customers and employees crossing a picket line set up by representatives of a local of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The afternoon show on August 2 was given for an estimated 3,000 persons. Pickets had appeared about 9:00 AM, but were few in number throughout the day. It was reported that a spotlight worker, parking lot attendants and janitors had refused to cross the line to reach their jobs at the Cow Palace. Some local musicians approached the

**The big top center pole wagon No. 43 is shown loaded on the 1955 train.**



## USHERS AND EXTRA CHAIRS

The selling of circus seats for cash was mentioned by Michael Burke in his comments on the 1955 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey season. The underground economy of the circus usher department had been a tradition for decades.

As close a watch as Jerry Mugivan kept on the Corporation shows, it still went on right under his eyes. Stories have been told of a full wagon load of extra chairs being carried on the Floto and Hagenbeck shows, unbeknown to the management. Many people were part of the payoff that allowed extra rows of chairs to be added to the reserve grandstand of the circus. No tickets were printed for these extra chairs, as they did not exist on the regular listing of rows.

It was the responsibility of the ushers to erect the grandstand bibles and chairs. While putting the chairs in place the extra ones were added. These were sold for cash on the hippodrome track.

In the late 1940s Clyde Beatty became concerned that there was a serious money leak on his circus. He hired

a detective to look into the problem. It was soon found that extra rows of chairs were placed in the reserve sections and sold for cash by the ushers. These extra rows were always in front of the official row one.

It is thought that the practice spread to the Ringling-Barnum show during the Gumpertz years. The extra chair caper flourished over the years under various managers. While working as an usher on the Ringling show in 1942, a Robert Ringling year, I quickly learned the set-up. As an apprentice usher I was relegated to the blues. But there was an angle there also, called "high seating." The top two rows of bleachers were left empty as the audience was seated. After the blues were filled, rather than sitting on the ground, circus goers were offered the saved seats at one dollar a clip. The payers were snaked up through the tightly packed seats to the empty rows.

The practice of the ushers was one of many opportunities by various circus employees to pick up sizable amounts of extra cash. -Fred D. Pfenning, Jr.

line and then went away to get instructions. Show musicians and all other employees were reported in action as usual.

There was no immediate indication that executives of the union and circus had been in touch with each other, although both were in the same hotel. It was reported that John and Henry North were in conference with Michael Burke at the St. Francis Hotel.

Harry Karsh, whose Carnival and Allied Workers Union 447 had organized the Royal American Shows, was also at

the hotel, having come there some days earlier to await the show's arrival. With him was Joe Kane, the former Ringling usher who had sought earlier to organize the Ringling workers in the AFL Retail Clerks' Union. Kane and his

union had picketed the big show in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois.

Kane had not followed the show beyond Chicago, but conferred there with Karsh and transferred his affiliation to the Karsh union. It was at that time that they began planning to hit the show at the San Francisco stand.

As early as a week prior to the arrival of the circus in the Bay City, Joseph Diviny, Teamster union vice president, announced intentions of picketing the show there. It was the union's aim to organize all of the Ringling employees other than the performers and musicians. Picketing was to continue at other dates including Los Angeles.

Known for his harsh ways, Harry Karsh tried a few of his rough tricks before the show was through with its run at the Cow Palace. The only official on the show who could infuriate Karsh and do it in a masterful way was Noyelles Burkhart, who acted for the good of the show and everyone with it.

During the second San Francisco evening performance a line of pickets



**A Teamster union picket in front of the Cow Palace in San Francisco in 1955. Author's collection.**

was holding back patrons from entering the circus midway through the only passable gate. Burkhart, anticipating something like this would happen, was prepared for it. He sent word to the elephant boss Smokey Jones to bring three of the bulls to the gate. With large chains being held in their mouths swinging back and forth, they broke up the picket line and people surged through. Pictures and a story of the incident appeared in the local papers the next day. The newspaper article stated that there was little further action on the picket line until the show began moving out of the Cow Palace. One doorway was available to the show for moving cookhouse wagons and other equipment that was loaded early.

As the first wagons and trucks were assembled near the door, Harry Karsh and his pickets formed across the door, blocking it, and shouting that they would not move. Burke and Burkhart came on the scene and spoke briefly with Karsh. After a delay of about an hour manager Lloyd Morgan signaled the driver of the first truck to pull out with three cookhouse wagons. Pickets blocked the way as the truck came up to them. Morgan asked a sheriff on duty for road clearance. Pickets still re-

fused to move and were shoved aside by the on coming truck. It and several other trucks with wagons proceeded to the runs without further incident.

When a tractor pulling a property wagon came out of the building, the pickets shouted at the driver and then jumped in a car and drove in front of the tractor, curbing it. The tractor driver was shoved from the vehicle by one man while others temporarily stalled its transmission. When the tractor driver returned and reported to Morgan there was an upsurge of show loyalty and a canvas truck rolled out with about thirty men from the big top crew aboard with the intention of escorting the show vehicles to the train. Pickets tried to stop this truck also, but the sheriff ordered them to let it pass. Some reports stated that the canvasmen were armed with tent stakes, but this was not visible.

Morgan and the sheriff conferred and the show was advised that deputies would escort show wagons to prevent violence. Thereafter the move was smooth. Pickets made no effort to interrupt work at the runs but continued harrassing drivers at the Cow Palace door until about 1:30 AM. Other police patrolled the picket line at the building entrances where patrons were entering and leaving during the evening. When picketing started on September 2, one appeared at the downtown store where Ringling had its advance sale. The ticket sale was halted by the show so as not to embarrass the store.

The show played Fresno on Septem-

**The five Ringling brothers appeared at the entrance to the marquee in 1955. The new turnstiles are in back.**



## **RINGLING BROTHERS and BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS IS UNFAIR TO LABOR!**

YOU BE THE JUDGE

Here Are The Wages Which Keep These People In Economic Bondage!

SEAT DEPT. \$12.00 PER WEEK  
PROPAGEN \$14.00 to \$16.00 PER WEEK  
TRUCK DRIVERS \$22.00 PER WEEK  
CAT DRIVERS \$22.00 PER WEEK  
ANIMAL HANDLERS \$10.00 to \$14.00 PER WEEK  
COWBOYS & GROOMS \$14.00 PER WEEK

**REMEMBER—THIS IS THE WEEKLY SALARY—NOT DAILY PAY!**

THESE PEOPLE ARE ALL ON CALL 24 HOURS DAILY... 7 DAYS PER WEEK  
THEY AVERAGE 15 HOURS OF WORK DAILY!

THEY ARE NOT PROTECTED BY FEDERAL WAGE AND HOUR LAWS  
THEY ARE NOT PROTECTED BY WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION  
THEY HAVE NO HEALTH AND WELFARE PROTECTION  
AND YOU CAN IMAGINE WHAT THEY WILL DRAW IN UNEMPLOYMENT  
COMPENSATION AND SOCIAL SECURITY

WHY DO THESE PEOPLE WORK FOR THESE WAGES?  
BECAUSE THEY CANNOT AFFORD TO QUIT... THEY DO NOT HAVE  
ENOUGH MONEY TO TAKE THEM HOME!

Please Don't Help Perpetuate This Economic Bondage!

**TEAMSTERS UNION · A.F. of L**

**This leaflet was passed out by the pickets during the Los Angeles stand.**

ber 6 and Bakersfield on the 7th on the way to Los Angeles. During the move to Bakersfield an automobile stalled on the tracks forcing the engineer on the third section to jam on his brakes. The jolt freed seat wagons from their blocks on three flats and they rolled over the ends sills of the flats. The delay forced the show to blow the opening afternoon show in Los Angeles.

Arriving on the lot in Los Angeles the show found Joe Kane and a group of pickets. Karsh was in town but not on the show grounds. The pickets were handing out leaflets to the public, but there was little other action during the first days of the four day stand. The union seemed to have little affect on the approaching customers.

The circulars claimed Ringling was unfair to employees and it charged circus workers were in "economic bondage." It cited what it said were weekly wages in various working departments and said employees "can't afford to quit." Although the union stated it had the support of the Los Angeles Labor Council, there seemed to be little or no reaction to the picket line by members of other unions serving or attending the circus.

There still was no positive statement as to whether the show might go into Mexico after its El Paso, Texas stand, but it seemed increasingly unlikely. Meanwhile there was a new report that the show would follow its upcoming New Orleans stand with a run in St. Louis. This would be the show's first time in St. Louis since 1948, when it had an unsuccessful indoor date.

The entire Ringling show personnel breathed a sigh of relief when the circus completed the Los Angeles stand and headed back East. I remember only too well the night the circus was moving from East Los Angeles to Los Angeles when someone cut an air hose on the third section, bringing the train to a jolting sudden stop, toppling many people from their berths into the aisles. This happened in the railroad yards as the train was making up. The speed of the train was such that no injuries or damage occurred but everyone was frightened and cursed Harry Karsh for his bad manners.

After the Los Angeles date, the show got back into a regular routine without the picket lines and union harassment.

There was an unusual setup in Shreveport on October 26, where the Ringling-Barnum show appeared on the final day of the Louisiana State Fair. This unusual circumstance occurred after many years of conflict between the show and the fair. The circus' route generally brought it into the area while the fair was in operation. Twice the two played in opposition, with varying results. Often the circus had been unable to get local permits for dates that conflicted with the fair.

In 1955 the show sought a Shreveport date without success and tried to get a permit for suburban Bossier City for October 29. Then an agreement was reached for the circus to be part of the fair on October 26. Fair manager Joe Monsour said that in as much as no other dates fitted into the show's schedule, the fair felt it was fitting that the circus be added to the features of the nine day fair.



This unusual newspaper ad told of ten dates played by the Ringling-Barnum show in Texas in 1955.

The circus was erected in the infield of the fair race track. To reach the circus customers found it necessary to pay an admission charge at the fair gate as well as for the show.

At the fair the circus appeared along

**The Ringling and Royal American shows side by side at the Louisiana State Fair in 1955. Author's collection.**



side the Royal American Shows and a Barnes-Carruthers grandstand review. This was the second time in recent years that the Ringling-Barnum circus and the Royal American carnival played side by side. In 1940 they day and dated in Mobile, Alabama, with just a row of trees separating the two lots.

Since the show decided against the Mexico City date new plans were being formulated for an extended season and to play a date in Cuba. A published statement advised that the season would close in Ft. Meyers, Florida on December 4.

Some reshuffling of the immediate advance route was indicated when the Memphis date was postponed to November 2. Prospects for last minute changes loomed when the show began a court action to force the city of New Orleans to issue a license for November 21 through 23. The proposed St. Louis date did not materialize since the arena was not available.

The December 4 closing would fit in with a scheduled TV show from quarters on December 16. It also meshed with the scheduled departure from Sarasota on December 22 of the unit to play Havana. The Cuban engagement was scheduled to start on Christmas day and run through January 16. Although the Cuban dates had been set there was no indication on the show about who would be hired.

The late closing was interpreted as an effort to count in as many days as possible to make up for short grosses at many spots on the route.

Never before had Ringling-Barnum played December dates. The Barnum show had played dates in December 1876 to make an indoor run in New



**Ringstock wardrobe wagon No. 30 shows the enlarged Ringling name in 1955.**

York for two months ending December 9.

At New Orleans the show resisted when the city council decided against issuing a permit. The reason for the denial was believed to be pressure from the local Shrine which was sponsoring the Tom Packs show.

The circus filed suit in district court for a writ of mandamus which would require the city to grant the license. Final outcome remained to be seen as the show dates were coming up fast. In the past recent seasons few shows had resorted to court action in similar cases. However in earlier years there were frequent suits for writs and often these were won.

Both performances were lost in Corpus Christi on October 12 because the lot was too soft to support the wagons and tents. There had been a ten inch rain in Corpus Christi two weeks prior to the show's arrival. The lot was still flooded when the circus arrived and the first truck on the lot sank to its frame, and the date was quickly declared lost.

Late in October Milton Pickman was relieved of his position as promotional director of the show. The move ended the circus career of one of the most controversial persons to hit the business in years. Michael Burke said that some dissatisfaction and incompatibility had developed. After Pickman had been notified of the change general agent Paul Eagles was asked to take on the added job of routing the press agents. This was to be under the general guidance of Henry Ringling North, who had been active in press work since August. The change came while the show was in Houston.

A few days later publicity chief Ed Kno-blaugh assumed the direction of the press department, under terms of a third arrangement.

The influence of Pickman on the show had extended into other departments. His controversial plans and policies had also been major factors in many changes in Ringling staff personnel during the season. These included the departures of Frank McClosky as general manager, F. A. Boudinot, as general agent, Bev Kelley as TV-radio agent and many others.

While Pickman was active in many parts of the show's operation, there were numerous changes on the show during the season for which many believed him responsible but with which he had little or no connection. Among these was the closing of the Sarasota accounting office, the installation of turnstiles and the elimination of most of the usher department.

Pickman was a factor in setting up the policy for eliminating half price tickets for kids and for wholesale slashes in the number of passes given to press and contracting agents.

Burke commented more fully on the action. He said, "some of the experiments as recommended by Pickman weren't entirely successful." He added that that was not the direct reason for Pickman's departure. The show anticipated a "more balanced" advertising program for the 1956 season that was likely to include heavier use of outdoor advertising as well as more TV.

Burke said the show would continue to rely on experienced veterans next season and that newcomers would be trained during the winter months to work along side them in order to become familiar with the show's special needs. Speaking about the present system under which press agents placed advertising copy, Burke said it had been followed since the show cancelled its connection at mid-season with the Monroe Greenthal advertising agency. He added that Greenthal's law suit and attachment against the show for overdue fees in the amount of \$80,115.01, and advances had been dropped. The

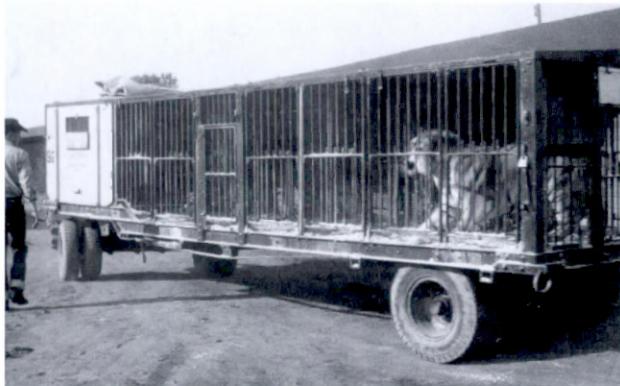


**Clown Otto Greibling doing his knitting during the elephant number of the 1955 Ringling performance.**

agency agreed to accept the schedule of payments which the show had proposed earlier. The final payment of \$5,115.01 was made to Greenthal on December 2, 1955.

A short item appeared in the November 5 *Billboard* dealing with the Madison Square Garden engagement in the spring of 1956 with only two or three weeks remaining before Garden executives would have to decide what circus would play the arena in 1956. Ned Irish reported that there would be a circus in the Garden, adding, "whose it will be, remains to be seen." Negotiations with the Norths over a Ringling appearance reportedly were still at an impasse. Irish said there was no truth in the current report that the Garden was demanding a portion of Ringling stock in return for the appearance privilege. Irish added that Arthur Wirtz and James Norris, owners of arenas in Chicago and St. Louis, had "a big laugh" when the rumor reached them about the possibility of their buildings being a part of a circus organization playing a new string of indoor dates, because "they had their share of ownership problems with Cole Bros."

By the middle of November an announcement was made that the Ringling show and the Garden had signed an agreement for a 1956 showing following more than seven months of long distance sparing over terms. The circus was to again open its season in the Gotham arena on April 4 with a night show and continue on a two a day basis, including Sundays, thereafter through May 13 for a total of thirty-nine show days, one less than in 1955.



**The performing tiger act was housed in cage No. 92 during the 1955 Ringling-Barnum season.**

Neither of the signers, John Ringling North, president of the circus, and James D. Norris, president of the Garden, would reveal any of the contract terms, including the duration of the pact. The contract which ran out in 1955 encompassed five years. It earned the Garden better than \$10,000 a day net. The remainder of the estimated \$2,000,000 gross (less some \$5,000 a day for Garden operating expenses) went to the circus.

While the circus earned a reported \$1,200,000 at the Garden, it reportedly

**Emmett Kelly and his new wife Evi posed in the backyard of the Ringling show in 1955.**



left New York with only \$100,000 after paying off its winter and production costs, with a firm conviction that Garden adjustments were in order to insure it a better financial start for its canvas tour. The circus was winging through the Southwest towards a closing in Florida and reported business spot-

ty at best. Following New Orleans the Ringling show played in Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina before making eleven stands in Florida to close out the season.

The last two weeks of the 1955 tour found the big show in its home state. For the past four weeks business had been fair to good with half houses at the matinees to three quarter or full houses at night. There had been some picketing in the larger cities but it drew very little attention from the circus crowds. Full thought was now being given to the upcoming TV performance to be made in quarters on Friday, November 16. After that, all management personnel would concentrate on the Havana engagement.

Although it had been mentioned that the show would close on December 4 in Ft. Meyers, that city was played on November 30. The show was in Lakeland on December 1, St. Petersburg on the 2nd, and Tampa on the 3rd before giving the final performances in Sarasota on December 4, 1955.

The final activity of the season was loading the cars for the Cuban engagement. The Havana train consisted of the following cars: Flat No. 116 carried wardrobe trunk wagons No. 142 and No. 143 and canvas truck No. 253. Flat No. 118 carried wardrobe wagon No. 125, a float, D4 Cat No. B4 and property wagon No. 57. Flat No. 115 carried a seal act truck, seal act cage No. 77, light plant No. 114 and lion cage No. 93. Stock car No. 103 carried horses and stock car No. 226 carried elephants.

The cars were sent to West Palm Beach via the Seaboard Airline Railroad

where they were loaded on the Florida-Havana railroad car ferry.

Statistics for the 1955 season show that there were 245 days played with a total of 487 performances. The circus gave 375 performances under canvas. One hundred and two performances were given indoors, 81 in Madison Square Garden, 13 in the Boston Garden and 8 in the Cow Palace.

Five stands were played in Canada where the show had last been in 1953.

There were 111 one day stands, a nine day stand in Chicago, four day stands in Washington, D.C., Montreal, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Three day stands were played in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Seattle, Dallas, Houston, New Orleans and Miami. Two day stops were made in Baltimore, Newark, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Denver, Spokane, Portland, Phoenix, El Paso, Odessa, Ft. Worth, San Antonio, Atlanta and Savannah. The circus played 32 Sunday dates. The 1955 season was the longest in the history of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Two factors had affected the success of the 1955 tour. One was the involvement of Milton Pickman. His "new methods" harmed business done by the show. It was not until late in the season that this was clear, and he was discharged. To a lesser extent were the problems of attempted union organization. Joe Kane and Harry Karsh irritated the show but were not successful in getting control of any employees. The problems that arose during the 1955 tour would return the following season and lead to the downfall of the big show under canvas.

#### SEASON'S REVIEW

It is not too late to make a contribution to the 1987 circus season in review that will appear in the January-February 1988 issue of *Bandwagon*. Data on smaller shows and spot and sponsored dates are particularly needed.

Please send photos, newspaper ads or information to Fred D. Pfening III, 2315 Haverford Road, Columbus, Ohio 43220.



Allan C. Hill  
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"Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's The Living Unicorn® and The Great Wallendas stellar attractions from the Circus World Museum's 1987 season."

*"Where Circus History Comes to Life"*



A  
Most Joyous  
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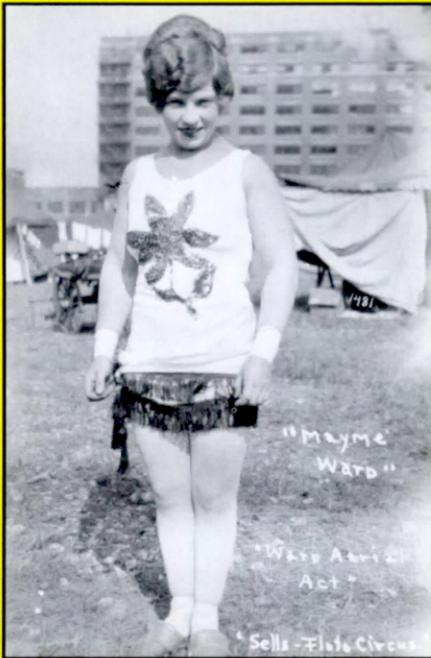
and

CIRCUS VARGAS

photo memories of the

# Sells-Floto Circus

in the mid-1920s



Mayme Ward of the Ward flying act, 1927.

Captain Bill Curtis poses before the stake driver, 1927.



The Two Jesters steam calliope, 1924. This is the earliest known photo of this wagon.



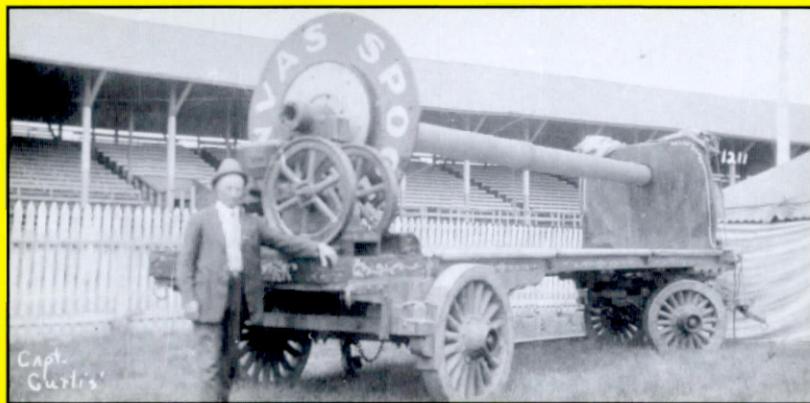


Loading the cookhouse wagon on a Sunday run at Wayko, Oklahoma, September 4, 1927.

Antoinette Comeau in her first season in the circus business, 1927. She became a legendary flyer as Antoinette Concello.



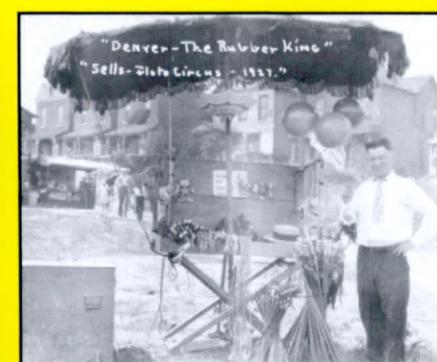
Erma Ward of the Flying Wards, 1927.



Bill Curtis and his patented spool wagon, 1927.

Jimmy Davidson in his Phunny Phord, 1927.

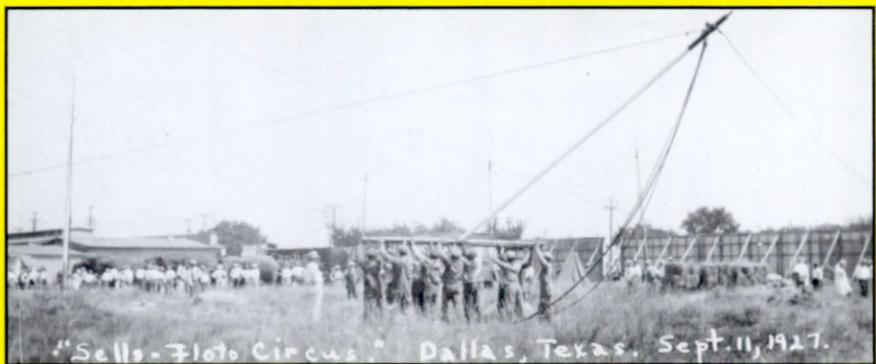
"Denver, the Rubber King," novelty joint, 1927.





*"Fred Mullen officiating"*

Fred Mullen, air calliope, 1926.

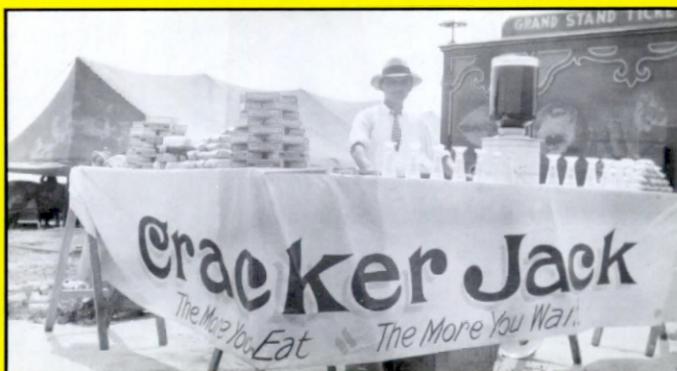


*"Sells-Floto Circus," Dallas, Texas, Sept. 11, 1927.*

Raising a center pole at Dallas, September 11, 1927.



*The Elephant Tableau with big show band ready for parade, 1925.*



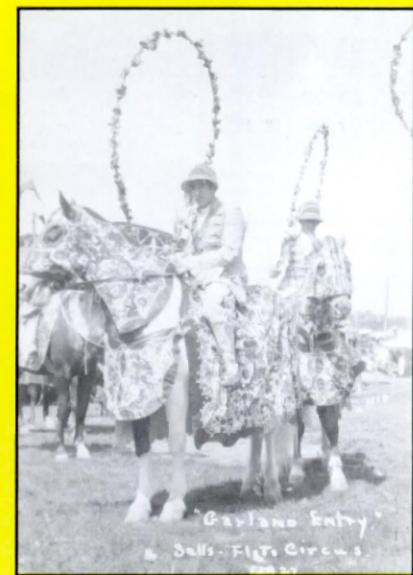
Cracker Jack, juice and peanut stand, c. 1927

Garland entry, 1927.

Inside the big top, ready for the show, c. 1926.



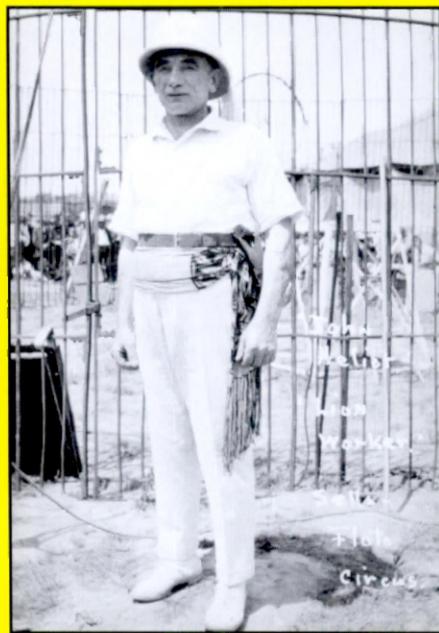
*Sells-Floto Circus*



*"Garland Entry"*  
*& Sells-Floto Circus*



Mickey King as a jockey rider, 1927.



John Helliot, lion trainer, 1927.



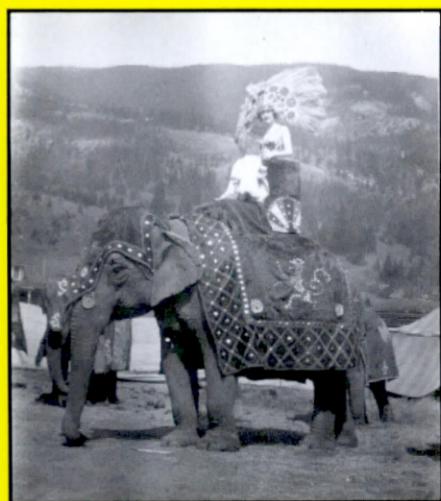
Making a side show opening bally, 1926.

Evalina Brightwell in howdah, ready for spec, c. 1926.



Cyse O'Dell making high jump, c. 1926.

Open air menagerie, c. 1927.



# The Valentine Family of Flyers

## a Tribute to Lorraine Valentine

By Steve Gossard and Cherie Valentine

Circus acts are one of a few professions which are generally carried on by families. Due to the complexity of the tasks to be mastered, the amount of time required in the training process, and the intimacy which must exist between the teacher and the student it is often the family members who are broken into the act first; and if the novice is not already a member of the family he or she may eventually marry into the family of the circus act. Persons who join an act who are not blood relatives are usually spoken of, thought of, and treated as if they were actually family members, sharing meals and living quarters just as if they were members of an extended family, often taking the family name as his or her own stage name. In some cases new members as much as give up their own family ties, and are "adopted" into the circus family. These inductees are subject to all the

emotional support, protection, and affection as well as the petty jealousies, complaints, and conflicts of the circus family in the same way that any real family member would be. The family members often branch off to form troupes of their own but retain the professional advantage of the family name. To a certain extent all members of the troupe assume responsibility for one another just as a family might and the success and longevity of the troupe itself depends on the closeness of the bonds between its members. The Valentine family of Bloomington, Illinois is a good example of this "family within a family" principle.

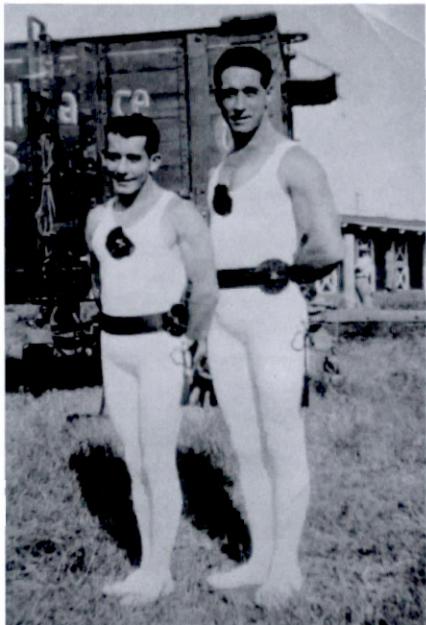
The first of the Valentine brothers to go into trapeze work was George. George D. Valentine, son of George W. and Lillian Valentine, was born March 2, 1898. Both of George's parents were deaf mutes. They had, in fact, met at a state school for the deaf somewhere in Illinois. When George took up catching for various flying acts his father often came to watch him practice at the Y.M.C.A. and could often be seen conversing through hand signing.<sup>1</sup>

In 1913 the Valentine family was living at 1406 S. East Street in Bloomington and George Sr. was listed as "molder Co Op Stove Co." in the city directory. The younger George was a driver for the Evans Bros. Company residing at the same address, obviously assuming adult responsibilities at a very early age. In 1915 George and his father were both working for the Co-Operative Stove Co., and they were living at 701 1/2 W. Apple St. in Normal, Illinois. In 1917 the Valentine family moved to 1401 Eastholm in Bloomington where they remained for many years. In 1919 George Sr. was working for the Empire Foundry Co. and George Jr. was listed without reference to his occupation. He was not listed in the *Bloomington Normal Directory* again until the 1924-25 issue. During this period George Jr. was, no doubt, serv-

ing in the military. Geraldine (Sue) Pelto, who worked with George's flying act from 1935 until 1950, was once told by George that he had lied about his age and joined the army with his older brother, Charles, during World War I, where he saw action in France.<sup>2</sup> A photograph in the Valentine collection pictures young George with Charles in doughboy uniforms and is captioned "From Dijon France." Having returned from overseas George again took up his former occupation as a molder for the Hayes-Custer Stove and Furniture Co. and was living with his new wife, Doris, at 709 E. Washington St. in 1924-25. Times might have been hard for George for in 1926 he and Doris were residing with his parents on Eastholm Avenue once again. It was about this time that Harry Foreman broke George in as a catcher for his flying troupe, the Flying LaMars, for

**The Flying Concellos in 1930, left to right, Arthur Concello, Antoninette Concello and George Valentine. Valentine collection.**





Lester Thomas and George Valentine of the Flying Clarkonians on Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in 1931. Valentine collection.

in 1928 George was listed for the first time in the *Bloomington Normal Directory* as "aerial artist" and he and Doris were living at 811 W. Mill Street. The Valentine brothers were all known for their athletic ability, especially boxing, and George must have been recruited during practice at the Y.M.C.A., where Harry LaMar was always on the lookout for new talent. The LaMar troupe at that time consisted of Harry LaMar (Forman), George Valentine and Ray Hendryx, but George had certainly left the LaMars in 1928 when the troupe left for Australia.<sup>3</sup> While catching for Harry one day at the Y.M.C.A. George looked down toward the gym floor to see the yearning eyes of a young gymnast looking up at him. It was Harold "Tuffy" Genders, a distant cousin of George's wife, Doris. "Do you want to try to swing off?" George asked him. Tuffy had been waiting for an opportunity to try his hand at flying. "Swing out and give me your feet," George told him. This was Tuffy's first experience on the trapeze. In 1929 he joined Eddie Ward's troupe and he was with the Robinson show when Eddie died that year. Tuffy would work with George again in a few years.<sup>4</sup>

George probably worked with the flying Sullivans in 1928 or 1929 on the Sells-Floto show and he must have been well known to the people associated with the famous Flying Ward troupe at this time. Apparently circus life didn't appeal to his wife Doris for in 1929 he was again living at home with his parents while she was living at a different address. In the 1930-31 directory they were again living together at 1203 Park Street and George's occupation was listed as "acrobat" but this apparent reconciliation was short-lived for in 1932 they separated permanently.<sup>5</sup>

Having become known to the inner circle of the Flying Wards, George was recruited in 1930 as the first catcher for the newly formed Flying Concellos troupe on Robbins Bros. Circus. According to the *Billboard* review of May 24 Art Concello was doing a double full twisting somersault and his wife Antoinette was doing a double, as features of their new act, and "the catcher is A-1." And when the show played Circleville, Ohio on May 17 it was George who carried Mickey King's limp body back to the dressing room after she had fallen thirty feet head first to a wooden stage floor. This was the first of three near fatal plunges which Mickey took in the 1930s. As Mickey says, "Me and George go back a long way."<sup>6</sup>

Three photographs in the Valentine collection offer an explanation of what George was doing in 1931. The first photograph pictures George and Lester Thomas with the Flying Clarkonians. The second pictures George and Les standing in front of a Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus wagon. The third photo is of George, Les and an unidentified girl flyer. This must have been in 1931 when the Clarkonians first appeared with Hagenbeck-Wallace. The flying acts for the opening of Hagenbeck-Wallace for 1931 were listed in *Billboard* May 9 as "three Shepherds and two Clarkonians." Frank Shepherd was the sensational single trapeze artist and Les Thomas was married to his daughter Peggy. The unidentified girl in photo number three was probably Peggy and the three were probably the Flying Shepherds of that year.

During this time George Valentine was breaking in his brothers Fred and Bill on trapeze. Since most of the prac-

ticing was done in the Y.M.C.A. at Bloomington this is probably where the brothers received their initial training. Fred was surely working with George for the Sullivans in 1928 or 1929 (a photograph in the Valentine collection pictures George and Fred in costume with a Flying Sullivan poster between them) but Fred was not listed in the *Bloomington Normal Directory* until 1932, when he first appeared as "aerialist" living with his parents on Eastholm Avenue. In 1932 Fred married his childhood sweetheart Elizabeth Reinholtz in Chicago.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, in 1931 Charles Siegrist had broken his neck in a bad fall into the net during an opening engagement of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in Madison Square Garden. The Flying Concellos were moved up, along with the Harold Voise troupe, from Sells-Floto Circus to the Ringling show. The next season Art Concello again recruited George Valentine as his catcher. George was then known as the best catcher in the business and Art was anxious to make a good impression and retain his position with Ringling. George later characterized Art and Antoinette as "a couple of scared kids" working along side of the great Alfredo Codona. Working for Ringling Bros. was, no doubt, a character building experience for George as well. It was during the 1932 season that George was paid one of the highest compliments a catcher could possibly receive. Alfredo Codona asked him to catch for him in the event that his brother Lalo should ever leave the act. Alfredo was acknowledged to be the greatest flyer in the world at that time (and is still considered to be the model for comparison) and George was fond of repeating this story for the rest of his life. George had a great deal of respect for the Codonas, and when he formed his own flying act he made a point of following their advice. "They said that your appearance and the way you come out is what helps to sell your act."<sup>8</sup>

At the close of the 1932 season George parted company with the Concellos over some difference of opinion with Art, intending to form his own flying act. George and Art were both strong willed and George wanted a

troupe over which he could have complete control.

In late March performance of the Y.M.C.A. Circus during the mid-1920s in Bloomington a little girl who was performing with an amateur dance troupe chanced to meet a young lady aerialist on the back stairway leading to the dressing room. Though she was only twelve or thirteen years old at the time little Lorraine Mather never forgot the incident. "Hi, kid," was all she said to me," Lorraine recalled nearly sixty years later, "and I was thrilled. I thought that she was so beautiful that I wanted to grow up to be a star on the trapeze just like her. . . just like Mickey King."<sup>9</sup>

As a young girl Lorraine often spent time watching the flying acts practice at the Y.M.C.A while her father played chess. She made friends with young Gracie Moore of the well known Moore family of acrobats from Peru, Indiana. Gracie had joined the Flying Wards along with her sister Mitzi while with Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1928. Gracie married Tuffy Genders while with Bob Fisher's Fearless Flyers in 1932 at Idlewild Park while on the pedestal board of the trapeze rigging.<sup>10</sup>

Lorraine's first boyfriend was none other than Art Concello. "He was a real gentlemen," Lorraine said. "He called my mother and asked her permission to take me to the movies. He dropped by one afternoon and we walked to the theater downtown."<sup>11</sup> This young girl's head was filled with dreams of flying.

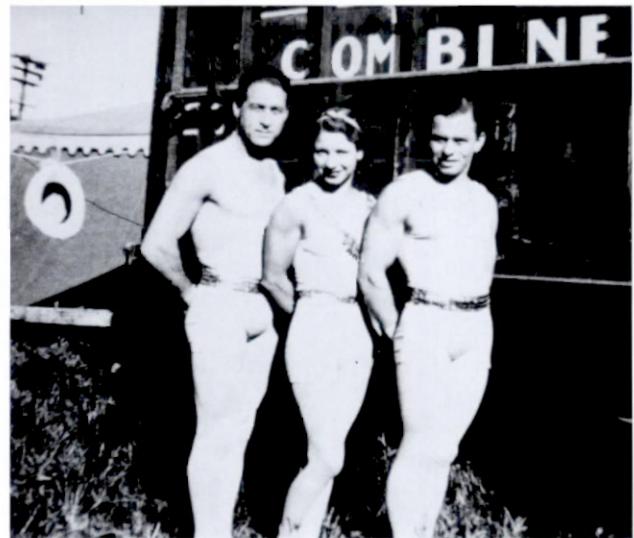
Standing outside the "Y" one winter afternoon with his friend Walt Graybeal, George Valentine was scouting for talent for his would-be flying return act. Gary Schoepfle's 1979 article for *Bloomington-Normal Magazine* recorded one of Lorraine's favorite stories: "Lorraine Mather happened to be walking by. Graybeal piped up in his usual joking and good-natured manner: 'There's a girl that wants to learn to fly.' He called her over. George then asked, 'Would you like to be a flyer?' I don't think that I could,' responded Lorraine. 'I didn't ask you if you could,' said George, 'I asked you if you wanted to.' What was there to think about? Lorraine immediately answered, 'Yes!' This was the end of her circus daydreams and

the first day of a twenty-five year career."

This interview with Lorraine went on to provide a unique insight into the experience of the novice flying student: "The first thing you have to learn is how to hit the net. That's most important. . . You go up and get hold of the bar. They tell you, 'Don't drop in the net until you swing all the way out to the end. Then let go. Put your arms in close to your body, and just float down on your back.' Then you get out there. Your insides are saying, A-A-A-A-H! They say, 'Drop!' A-A-A-A-H! And you swing back. Next time you get out there, drop!' A-A-A-A-H! You can't let go, no way can you let go of that bar. You swing and swing and your hands get so tired. Then finally, no more can you hang on. You just fall in the net. It's an awful feeling until you get used to it! They all stand and laugh at you."

Lorraine was a flyer who was made rather than born. She freely admitted that she didn't have a great deal of strength and agility. George's brother Fred often told George, "You're wasting your time with that girl. She'll never be a flyer." But George didn't give up on her, and, what is more important, she didn't give up on herself. "It made me work harder," she said. Lorraine kept her dream alive with determination.<sup>12</sup>

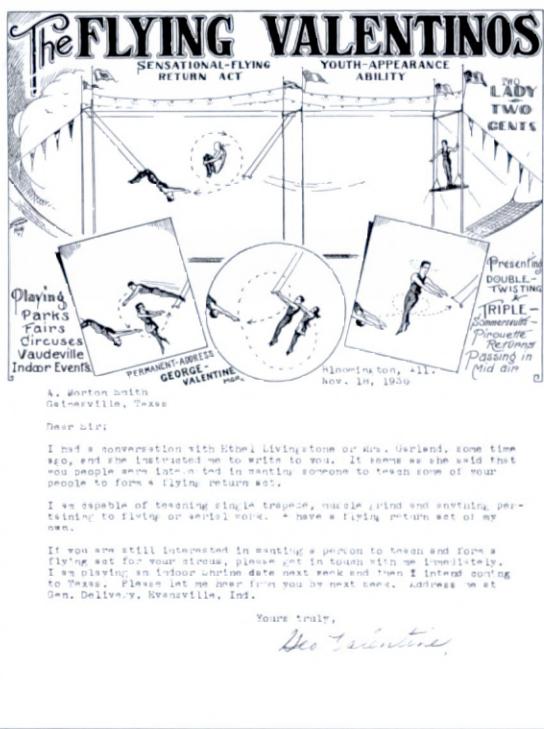
The Valentino troupe is a good example of a first-class flying act which operated "independently," booking a variety of outdoor and indoor circuses, carnivals and fairs. An examination of the itineraries of the Valentino troupe, compiled by Lorraine's daughter Cherie from her mother's personal records, provides two things for the circus historian. First, it is an example of the busy schedule and extensive travels of a troupe which customarily operated independently. Second, it is an illustration of the limitations of conventional research materials. For the year 1936, for example, the author was able to find only five references to the Valentinos



The Flying Concellos on the Ringling show in 1932. George is on the left. Valentine collection.

among the circus pages of the *Billboard* as compared to the twenty-three cities in which they actually worked. Obviously, to attempt to chronicle a detailed history of such a troupe by normal research is limited. By comparison, the available information on other Valentine brothers' flying acts is very lean. Many of the sources for this article were taken from articles in Lorraine's scrapbooks clipped from unidentified newspapers.

The first year on the road George did not call his troupe the Valentinos. This was probably the troupe called "Valentine's Flying Thrillers" which the *Billboard* stated was doing fairs for the Eastern Circus Corp. early in 1933. Prior rights to the name "Flying Valentinos" were held by another George Valentine (or Valentino), the same George Valentine who had broken Ernie Lane in as a flyer in the early 1900's. Lorraine recalled that George had paid a visit to George the first during her first year with the troupe, for the purpose of obtaining rights to the name "Flying Valentinos." The older George was at the time working as a clown. He freely gave his consent to the transfer of the Valentino name "because he knew that George would never run the act down." The Valentinos would always be an act with class. It was something to live up to.<sup>13</sup>



This letterhead was used by George Valentine in the mid-1930s. Pfening Archives.

Lorraine did not perform with the flying act the first year out in 1933 but she continued to practice under George's direction. Her parents tried to discourage her from joining a circus troupe, Schoepf tells us. "You're not going to be in a circus," they said. "If you do you're gonna leave home." But Lorraine stated that "after a week on the road with the act they welcomed me home with open arms." George presented his flying act in 1933 with Tuffy and Gracie Genders while Lorraine did a single trapeze and web routine. Lorraine developed a warm friendship with Tuffy and Gracie which lasted through the years and miles of separation to the end of her life.<sup>14</sup>

The Valentino troupe toured with the Seils-Sterling Circus in 1933 calling themselves the "Original Flying Valentinos" for a time playing in the Midwest and South with a number of stands at fairs.

In Aberdeen, South Dakota they were listed as the Original Flying Valentinos. By the time they worked Lawrenceburg, Tennessee they were calling themselves the Flying Valentinos. The

truck show touring the fairs in the 1930's: "The best I can possibly offer you is seventy-five dollars a week, (\$75.00) starting around the first week in September and running into December. We will also furnish your gasoline and oil for your car, and you can eat in our cookhouse . . . we feed three meals a day on this show, and Pay Day is on Sunday, EVERY SUNDAY. . . . If you do not have your own living accommodations and have your own bedding and cots you can use one of the tents for sleeping."

Lindeman stated that his feature acts were already booked for the season and "the addition of another feature act will not benefit me from a financial standpoint. . . . The only benefit to me will be in future bookings."<sup>15</sup>

Lorraine made her first appearance with a flying act in 1934 at the St. Louis Police Circus substituting for one of the lady flyers with Bob Fisher's Fearless Flyers. Fisher's troupe consisted of three men and two women with Benny Gibson catching. The rest of the season Lorraine traveled with the Flying Valentinos.<sup>16</sup>

This was the only year that the three Valentine brothers George, Fred and Bill worked together in one flying act. A few years later Fred and Bill broke

Huntsville *Alabama Daily Register* reported September 14 that the Valentinos had come direct from "a year's tour of the leading cities of Europe having been for several years the starring attraction of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus," and stated that the woman with the act worked blindfolded with a sack over her head. The fact that Lorraine Valentino saved this clipping along with the heading and date of the publication is an indication that the Valentinos were themselves amused by this kind of press.

In June Seils-Sterling offered George contracts for the 1934 season. Manager Albert Lindeman's letter is an illustration of what one could expect while traveling with a

younger brother Roy in with their act. This may have been Bill's first year working with a flying act since he was listed in the *Bloomington-Normal Directory* as "mldr. r 1401 Easthold av." Some performers were known to list alternate winter seasonal employment as their occupations, however, to skirt insurance restrictions placed on performers with dangerous occupations.<sup>17</sup> The Valentinos opened the season working eastern fairs for the Barnes Carruthers booking agency. They followed with two weeks in Houston for Hennies Bros. carnival and bought a new Ford truck to transport their rigging. They worked the Winnipeg, Canada Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition August 4-11 where Fred was advertised as "America's youngest aerialist" doing a "sack double." This was to become a favorite trick with the Valentine family. Mayme Ward had been featured doing sack tricks with the Flying Wards in the 1920's. In time the Valentine family would perform every kind of trick from passing leaps to triple somersaults in burlap.

The importance of the visual orientation of a flyer in motion has sometimes been underestimated since it is

Lorraine Valentine in 1933. Valentine collection.



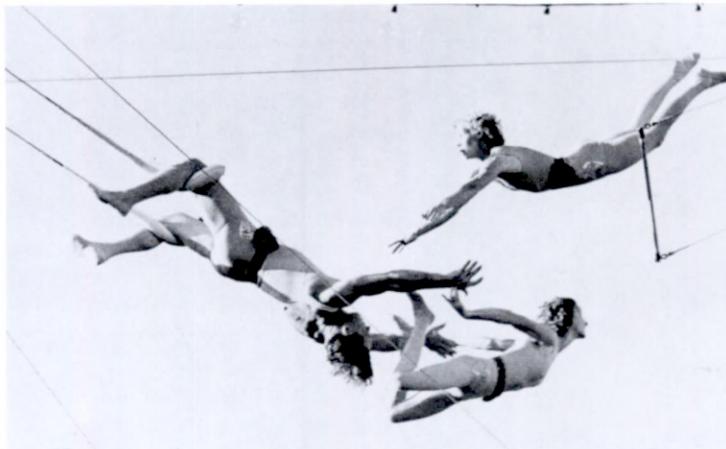
assumed that when a flying act masters a stunt the trick happens so fast that timing, rather than vision, is the crucial factor. On at least one occasion, however, a flying act was greatly handicapped by impaired vision. *Billboard* reported on April 26, 1947 that the Flying Concellos missed several tricks at Sioux Falls, South Dakota due to poor lighting in the ceiling of the arena. This writer has never heard of an act in which the catcher performed blindfolded, however, which may be as much an indication as anything of the importance of the catcher's vision.

In September the Valentinos worked Algona, Iowa; Greenfield, Iowa; Warsaw, Indiana; Alta, Iowa and Lawrence, Massachusetts.

Brother Bill may have begun the 1935 season with the Valentinos but was not working with the act at the end of the tour. They opened the season with the George Loos Greater United Shows playing Texas and Plains states dates. In Dallas the Valentinos were performing for the Loos carnival in an Emancipation Day Celebration "for the negro population of the south" with an attendance of 20,000 black people. Here they were a free attraction performing on the midway.<sup>18</sup>

George and Lorraine had been working together for nearly three years. On September 16 they "snuck off" to Peoria, Illinois, where it would not be known that Lorraine was under age, and there they married. George's sister, Geraldine, recalls an incident once on Lorraine's birthday when the Valentinos were performing. As George and Lorraine made a hand catch he unexpectedly drew her up to kiss her as they swung back and forth, the entire crowd looking on from below. When they finished the act Lorraine was presented with a bunch of roses. A romance on the trapeze could be an impressive thing.<sup>19</sup>

An article from Lorraine's scrapbook stated that "Mrs. Valentino" was then 20 years old and had been working with the act for three years. Her single act, it was said, was "guaranteed to grow hair on a bald man." The troupe was composed of Mr. and Mrs. Valentino" and "a young brother of Mr. Valentino." "A fourth member of the troupe failed to



**A passing leap performed by George and Lorraine Valentine and Sue Pelto. Taken in the late 1930s. Valentine collection.**

reach one of the swinging bars after a double flip during the past week and 'Johnny doesn't work with the Valentinos any more.'

At the end of the season Lorraine took a bad fall into the net. An article in Lorraine's scrapbook reads: "Flying Valentinos, following a successful season of fairs for Barnes Carruthers and later with Greater United Shows will winter in Texas. . . . At closing in Corpus Christi, Texas Lorraine Valentine sustained neck injuries during the act." It seems that the rigging had been hung incorrectly for this date. Lorraine could barely reach the flybar, throwing her timing off and causing her to miss a trick with tragic consequences. Her neck was broken. At this time George recruited an athletic young lady named Geraldine Pelto (whom they called Sue), who had been a champion speed skater in Minnesota. George started her out working on a single trapeze in the mornings and "on the high riggin" afternoons. While Lorraine was bed-ridden Sue sat with her through the long winter months turning her head back and forth from time to time to keep her neck from becoming rigid. The pain and fear must have been extreme yet Lorraine had the spirit to cope with it all. Sue demonstrated amazing patience and fidelity to her new partner during this difficult period and the two developed a close friendship which endured to the end.<sup>20</sup>

The Valentine family troupe broke up at the end of 1935. Fred later stated, "We don't work together because we've got different ideas." Lorraine stated that the rift between George and Fred arose from a difference of opinion as to how and why the pedestal board had been

mounted incorrectly on that occasion. There were implications of willful neglect. George must have felt responsible for what had happened since he was the manager of the troupe. It may have helped to share that responsibility with his brother Fred. Regardless of who was at fault, the seriousness and tragic consequences of the incident were enough to split the troupe apart. Fred soon formed his own troupe, the Flying Valentines.<sup>21</sup>

In 1985 the author had access to films in the collection of the Museums Department at Illinois State University. Lorraine sat one afternoon watching vintage films of her own and other flying acts with which she had been familiar in her younger days. To sit together with the little seventy-year old lady watching these films was an unusual experience. It seemed as if she had stepped briefly back in time, and part of her conversation was delivered playfully to the people in the film itself, in the same way as she might talk to her pet cat. One feature of the Valentino flying act which is worth remarking (apparent both in the museum films and in Lorraine's personal home movies) is that George caught "his girl" with his arms bent, more as if he were plucking them out of the air than actually catching them. Few catchers consistently practiced this feat of strength, although most catchers would not want to take it up since it inhibited the flyer's mobility somewhat. As Art Concello put it, "Nobody could do a pirouette off those short arms."<sup>22</sup> This was true, but this form of catching did not diminish their abilities otherwise. With the exception of pirouettes the girls were able to do

almost every trick which the top men flyers were able to do at the time, and a few which no one else could do; tricks as complex as a forward over passing leap, twisting tricks, carrying tricks and Lorraine's "two-and-a-half in a sack." This does not necessarily mean they were not capable of catching tricks in the normal manner. Jim Olson states that once when Sue was watching the Flying LaMars practice on a rigging outside the Valentine barn in Normal, Illinois he asked her if she would like to swing off. "She threw me the prettiest double," Jim says, "and we caught it just as if we'd been practicing it for weeks." This was a surprise for Jim because it was well known that George never allowed Lorraine and Sue to work with any catcher other than himself. Jim stated that he also caught with "short arms" before, but only if the trick "came inside" where it was impossible to make a smooth swing. When a heart condition forced George to retire from the flying act in 1951 he refused to let Sue go out with Lowell and Mary Sherer's flying act until Lowell could demonstrate he was able to catch Sue in the same way. From Concello's remark concerning George's catching technique it can be assumed that George had been catching in the conventional manner before Lorraine and Sue joined him. Lorraine's own remark concerning this was that George used it as a protective measure, probably a reaction to Lorraine's unfortunate fall.<sup>23</sup>

George's protective attitude also influenced their lifestyle on the road. Not only were the girls prohibited from working with other catchers, but they also associated with few people outside of their "family" unit. Lorraine often stated that she remembered seeing other acts perform but didn't know the people personally because George "kept us pretty much to ourselves." It should not be assumed, however, that this was unusual among circus performers, although it did represent a rather conservative attitude for the times. The men traditionally assumed a protective role with the ladies in the act as a buffer between them and less professional, possibly unsavory people who might be traveling with carnivals and circuses.



**The Valentinos in 1937 or 1938. Evelyn Radford, Lorraine Valentine, George Valentine and Sue Pelto. Valentine collection.**

Coupled with this concern for their well being was also a possessive motive for confining their society within the troupe. Flyers were often "stolen" from one troupe by another and the manager of any troupe usually kept a close eye on his performers. Walt Graybeal recalls once when Charles Siegrist saw him talking to one of the flyers in Charlie's troupe, he railed at Graybeal, afraid that Walt would talk the fellow into leaving Siegrist's act. Walt states that etiquette demanded that he should ask George's permission once when he wanted to ask Sue Pelto out for a date. George's answer: "Hell, no. If I let her go out with any guy that comes along she'll be going off and leaving us to work in someone else's act."<sup>24</sup> Of course it is worth mentioning that Walt's reputed success with the ladies is still well known in certain circles, as George must have been aware at the time.

George called in Oscar Jordan, veteran of the original Charles Siegrist troupe, to fill in with the act until Lorraine and Sue "were good enough to carry the act without men."<sup>25</sup> It was George's idea to present an act with all women flyers which was good enough to do all tricks which male flyers could do. There were two very reasonable purposes for this. First, recalling conditions during World War I, George could foresee that if con-

ditions ever again brought about a shortage of manpower it would be an advantage to have all girl flyers. Second, women flyers generally drew more applause for doing simpler tricks. An all girl flying act doing difficult stunts should be a standout. This was an idea which had come of age within the past few years. Mayme Ward and Pauline Loretta had proposed the same idea in 1933. George might have foreseen the possibilities of such an act while working with the Concellos earlier, Antoinette being such a strong flyer herself.

The Valentinos started off the 1936 season working the Za-Ga-Zig Shrine Show in Des Moines, Iowa traveling in a new V-8 car and truck. They followed with dates in the Midwest, the Plains states and the South. The personnel for the St. Louis Police Circus was listed as George, Sue, Lorraine and Oscar. A *Billboard* article from July 25 stated that the Valentinos were working for the Landis shows and would follow with ten weeks for Barnes Carruthers. From May to July they worked as a free attraction. The Decatur, Indiana date was played for Foust's Flying Circus. In Archbold, Ohio they were billed as "Archbold's feature attraction for the '36 celebration" with Lorraine and Sue also doing a double trapeze number at 10:00 PM followed by the "Five Valentinos" at 10:30 PM. They became a favorite act of the Omaha Shrine Circus and were called back year after year to play this date.

The October 17 *Billboard* mentions the Valentinos working for Barnes Carruthers in Alabama and North Carolina where they brought a new house trailer and car. At Evansville, Indiana "Mlle. Lorraine" was doing "traps and muscle grinds" along with the flying act and the Billettis high wire act was also featured on the bill. The Billettis were a popular Washington state based act which adopted Bloomington as their winter quarters. The Valentinos finished the season working the Culver Press Club Halloween Celebration in Cincinnati.<sup>26</sup>

In 1936 Fred took out his own troupe for the first time with Big State Shows in Texas. They also worked the Frank J. Walter underprivileged Children's

Circus that year. This may have been the year that their sister, Geraldine, states that she practiced through the winter with Fred and Roy. She does not remember brother Bill catching for the act at that time. Geraldine did not go out with the troupe, however, because she had struck up a romance with a boy at home. The brothers were "sore about it for a couple of years." They had bought wardrobe, etc. That was Geraldine's only experience with a flying act.<sup>27</sup>

Working so many southern dates and impressed by the convenience of the climate, the Valentinos wintered in Texas after the 1936 season. In February 1937 George W. Valentine died at his home in Houston. The funeral for the father of these fine performers was attended by many circus people as well as a large group of people from the deaf community. The brothers' mother would survive for a year longer, passing away in February of 1938.<sup>28</sup>

In 1937 the Valentinos worked for the Howard Bros. carnival in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia from May through July, when they began playing fairs. They began breaking in two sisters named Pauline and Evelyn Radford. Pauline dropped out very soon, but Evelyn did perform with the troupe. An article in the Valentine scrapbook stated that Evelyn was fourteen years old, four foot ten and weighed 98 pounds. The girl flyers' salary was said to be \$35 per week (\$50 for girl catchers and specialty acts). This was one of several attempts to expand the troupe. Sue recalls that at various times George brought in Doris Girtin, Mary Atterbury and Esther Escalante to practice with the troupe. At Athens, Ohio they presented their flying act at 10:30 nightly for the Athens post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

A *Billboard* article from August 14 noted that after completing 14 weeks with Howard Bros. Carnival Co. the Valentinos would play Midwest and Southern fairs for Barnes Carruthers. The troupe consisted of "Jerry" Pelto, Evelyn Radford, Lorraine and George Valentine.

A *Billboard* article from December 18 stated that the Original Flying Valentines, managed by Roy G. and Freddie Valentine had completed 36 weeks dur-

ing the outdoor season, and closed with Hamid Morton Shrine Circus in Houston on November 6. From there they went to the Elks Thrill Circus in San Antonio in Mid-December. The troupe consisted of three brothers and a "sister-in-law." Their address was the 1600 block of 21st Street in Houston, Texas. The three brothers were Fred, Roy and Bill. A Bloomington *Daily Pantagraph* article stated that Bill had been with the troupe as a catcher until he broke his arm, when Francis (Gooch) Reiner took his place. At this time Fred was 27 years old and Roy was 24.

The 1938 season began for the Flying Valentinos at Jackson, Tennessee on March 14, followed by dates in Kentucky, Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota and Texas.

In June they were working for West



A 1940 photo of Belle Roberts, George Valentine, Sue Pelto and Lorraine Valentine. Valentine collection.

Bros. show with three girls featuring Lorraine doing a double in a sack. Evidently they worked with West Bros. for the northern dates and for the Bill Hames Shows for the southern dates. Sue recalls working for the Hames carnival as a free attraction. "He had us work real late at night to hold the people. I remember working at 2:30 in the

morning. People would bring blankets and lay around the rigging till it was time for us to go on. In June George invested money in an "Erie Digger," a coin operated, hand cranked prize game familiar to most carnival and fair lots. "That was one of my husband's big ideas," Lorraine said. She was "sore about it" at the time. The "diggers" were heavy and cumbersome, they took up most of the room in the truck, and they had to be assembled and supervised at every stand. "It didn't last long," she said.<sup>29</sup>

That year the Flying Valentines were working the Texas Shorthorn Shows, the troupe consisting of Roy, Fred, William and Mary Atterbury (whose parents owned and operated the Atterbury Bros. Circus). Later Roy and Mary were married and together they worked

up a double trapeze routine called the Aerial Romas.<sup>30</sup> They opened at Caracus with Gran Circo Schweyer and toured Venezuela and the West Indies. The Aerial Romas act was formed with this tour. Returning to the U.S. they picked up a trailer in Bloomington, Illinois and continued working parks and fairs. The Romas opened at the Kansas City Jubilesta with Barney Bros. Circus and rejoined the Valentine flying act with Polack Bros. Circus in December.

The Valentinos wintered in Houston and opened the 1939 season with Western State Shows in Crystal City, Texas. Evelyn Radford had left the troupe but their contracts for the season must have called for three girl flyers. George brought in Belle Roberts to work with the act. The Valentinos won the *Billboard* popularity poll that year, first appearing on the *Billboard* listings June 17 with 421 votes and finishing December 30 with 16,007 votes. Thus they were acknowledged by the readers of *Billboard* to be the best flying act in the country.

They appeared in Texas, Arkansas, Kansas, Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, Tennessee and Mississippi that year. Russell Springs, Kentucky became one of their favorite stops. This small town seemed almost deserted when they arrived, but when the show started "the

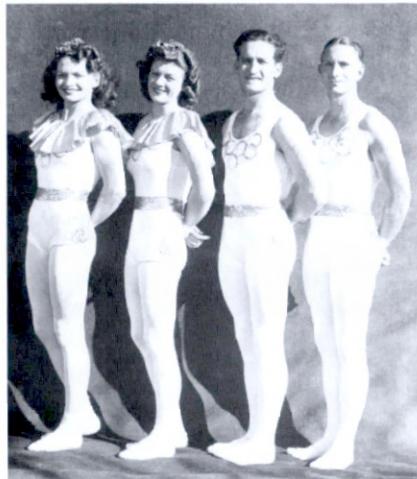
people came out of the hills" to watch it. The Valentinos were a favorite there. At most stands they played two performances daily. At Keokuk, for example, they played Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 2:30 and 8:00 PM; and Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 1:30 and 7:00 PM. Along with their extensive travels, ranging in one season from Texas to Michigan to Mississippi, the pace is fairly amazing.<sup>31</sup>

The Flying Valentinos played ten weeks with Happyland Shows in Michigan followed by fair engagements. Roy and Mary had left. The troupe was now made up of Freddie, owner and manager; Bill, catcher; and Bus Higginbotham, leaper.<sup>32</sup>

Few other troupe's movements were so thoroughly followed in the circus columns of *Billboard* than the Romas. It seems Roy and Mary kept it informed of their every move for many years. Their marriage began a somewhat stormy relationship and an extremely impressive career. During the winter of 1938-39 they were working with Polack Bros. Circus. Closing in February they went on to play the Minneapolis-St. Paul Shrine show. They then followed with Rink Wright's Shrine Circus in Omaha and Bob Morton's Circus in Buffalo and Pittsburgh. They were working with Hamid-Morton when the show closed at Hershey, Pennsylvania and then joined the Atterbury circus until opening their season of fair dates in Iowa and Minnesota. Following this they worked the West Point, Nebraska fair and the Clinton, Iowa Labor Day Celebration.<sup>33</sup>

The Valentinos' itinerary for 1940 started with the St. Louis Police Circus along with the Flying Behees and Flying Comets from April 4-23. It was followed by dates in Canada, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio and Alabama. They made a number of Shrine dates early in the year and during the later part of the season they were with Gold Medal Shows at Alabama fairs.<sup>34</sup>

The Flying Valentines were practicing in Akron, Ohio in 1940 breaking in a new girl for the act. They worked parks and fairs during the season, closing with three weeks at Idelwild Park, Ligonier, Pennsylvania. This same year Bill Valentine met a girl who was working photo concessions for a carnival



**The Flying Romas in 1940.**  
**Mary Atterbury Valentine, Pat Bowers, Roy Valentine and Wayne Bowers.** Pfening Archives.

unit. Bill and Doris were married, and her son, Ray (who was called "Slick") was soon working on the trapeze with his step-father.<sup>35</sup>

The Aerial Romas worked the Minneapolis Shrine Circus the winter of 1939-40 presenting two double trapeze acts. They continued working for Hamid-Morton in Milwaukee the week of February 19; Youngstown, Ohio Junior Chamber of Commerce Circus; the Omaha Shrine Circus and dates in Buffalo and Altoona as well. In April they cancelled their remaining dates with Hamid-Morton over a salary dispute, and continued with the Tangier Circus in Omaha where they presented a new stunt which they called a "stomach drop." Thereafter they played a celebration at Latonia, Kentucky; the American Legion Circus, Moline, Illinois; with Crowley Shows in Butte, Montana for Rodeo Week; and Salt Lake City Covered Wagon Days. In late July they added another female flyer to make a four person flying act. They may have already been presenting a flying act with the above dates with their double trapeze acts, but a *Billboard* article of August 10 was the first mention of the Romas' flying act. The salary dispute with Hamid-Morton may have resulted from the demand for a higher salary for the presentation of their new flying act. The new girl whom the Romas were breaking in was Pat Bowers. Lorraine stated that Roy later married

Pat after he and Mary broke up. They bought a new trailer in Sioux Falls, South Dakota en-route and continued playing the Cotton Festival at Dyersburg, Tennessee; Goodman Wonder Shows at Waco, Texas; visiting the Valentinos at Montgomery, Alabama; the Arabia Temple Shrine Show at Houston, Texas and finally buying a new car at the close of the season, they wintered in San Antonio. At Christmas time they visited Mary's parents.<sup>36</sup>

The Flying Valentinos opened 1941 with the Omaha Shrine Circus April 14-19. During the winter they had worked to perfect their newest stunt, a "two-and-a-half in a sack" by "LaRayne," who was advertised as the only lady flyer capable of performing this stunt. The two-and-a-half in a sack was a trick which George's brother Fred had never mastered. When she first caught the trick Lorraine derived a great deal of satisfaction in asking Fred, "Well, do you think this girl will ever be a flyer now?" This sensational trick was written into the Valentinos' contract for the 1941 season.

On the opening performance in Omaha, however, the band music was so loud that Lorraine could not hear George's cue, and she took off too early, missing the trick and taking a bad fall into the net. Though she suffered neck injuries she once again climbed the rope ladder and completed the trick to fulfill the contract. On going to the chiropractor for treatment after the show, George and Lorraine were told that they would have to wait their turn. He was a busy with a fellow who had gone to the circus and suffered a heart attack when he witnessed a girl falling from a trapeze. The inevitable question as to why anyone with a heart attack would visit a chiropractor for treatment is simply overshadowed by the irony of the situation. It makes a good story and Lorraine always loved telling it.<sup>37</sup>

For the Valentinos 1941 was a season punctuated by injuries. Playing Flint, Michigan Lorraine lost her footing on the rope ladder and fell, cutting her knee and back, and requiring twenty-two stitches. In Russell Springs, Kentucky, Lorraine broke a couple of George's ribs with a hard kick in the chest while doing a two-and-a-half. After Omaha they followed with two-and-

a-half weeks at Craig Beach Park in Diamond, Ohio.<sup>38</sup>

Back home in Bloomington Lorraine's mother composed lines of poetry to her daughter:

To LaRayne

Our eyes are all turned upward  
as you swiftly mount your board  
and the gleaming, shining spangles  
shine  
like stars far above,  
you hold your bar, then wait your  
cue  
Then, out ward-up high, you fly  
Far out to your catcher, who swings  
you back.  
And the crowds cheer your daring  
act.  
My heart beats fast as I watch you  
go  
and fly like a bird thru the air,  
and I whisper a prayer for my  
little girl,  
Please God, "Keep her safe in your  
care."

Lorraine's parents had not only reconciled themselves to her chosen profession, but now saw her accomplishments as a matter of personal pride. It might have been for the sake of rhythm and verse that George was referred to only as "your catcher."

Valentino itinerary for 1941 included appearances in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky and Minnesota. Playing at Streator, Illinois they had been guests of George's friend, Andy Baka-la.<sup>39</sup>

Among their other dates the Flying Valentinos played the Houston Shrine Show in 1941 at the Sam Houston Coliseum, along with the Flying Behrs, a troupe managed by Jerry Wilson. "Miss Valentine" was also doing ladders with the show.<sup>40</sup>

That year the Romas opened eight weeks of fairs with Tidwell Shows in Texas. It was a four person flying act with Roy, Wayne Bowers (catching), and Pat Bowers. They played as a free attraction in Mineral Wells, Texas and added Roland Marquis of the Casting Campbells on closing with Tidwell Shows in May. They followed with thirteen weeks with Byers Brothers Shows playing among other places the Cherry Festival at Travers City, Michigan. They played the Michigan State Fair for

Orrin Davenport in August. In September they added another girl flyer and they were predicting that they would present a seven person flying act for the next season, with four girls and three men. They began practicing their double trapeze act once again which they hoped also to present for the next season. The Romas then played eight Georgia fairs in October, beginning at Waycross. *Billboard* stated that they had contracted with Bob Morton for the 1942 season to present a seven person act with a double wide rigging. The week of November 24 they played the American Legion Fair in Ocala, Florida.<sup>41</sup>

The Valentinos began the 1942 season with the George A. Hamid show at Hinesville, Georgia March 26 through April 4 followed by dates in South Carolina, North Carolina and Maryland through May.<sup>42</sup> Later that month they joined the Mighty Monarch Shows pledging to buy a U. S. bond for every week worked. They played through October in Virginia, West Virginia and Texas.<sup>43</sup>

The activities of the Flying Valentines in 1942 are not certain but it may

#### George Valentine, Sue Pelto and Lorraine in 1943. Pfening Archives.



be safe to assume that they were again playing parks and fairs. The Flying Romas toured Georgia and Alabama fairs that year. It was stated in *Billboard* that the act would disband at the end of the season and Roy would join the Army Air Corps. Wayne Bowers and the two ladies would return home. This did not happen, however. The Romas continued playing the Macon, Georgia Shrine Show; Topeka, Kansas for Polack Bros.; and the Cleveland Grotto Circus for Orrin Davenport, all in the month of December.<sup>44</sup>

Ironically, of all the Valentine brothers, only George was called up for military service during the war years, and since he had already served his time, he was exempt. Since it had been his plan to avoid such problems by forming an act with all girl flyers, he was somewhat put out about the whole thing. During these years many of the male flyers were called into the service and those flying acts still working were especially sought after. "We could just about set our own price during those years," Lorraine said.<sup>45</sup>

In April 1943 the Valentinos contracted with Russell Bros. Circus for the tent season to provide a three person flying act for \$200 per week. While with the Russell show they visited Lalo Codona in Long Beach, California. They played the old ball park in Santa Crux, California May 22-23; Santa Barbara in May and the St. Louis Police show along with the Charles Siegrist troupe. George must have insisted on maintaining their flexibility and "independent" status while with Russell Bros. since clause number six was crossed off of the contract. It stated that "the ARTIST is engaged exclusively by the employer and during the period of this contract shall not perform. . . for any other person, firm, or corporation without permission of the EMPLOYERS. . ." This may have been one of the concessions which producers and show owners were willing to make during the war years to obtain the services of a first class flying act. In August George suffered an injury in a rigging accident and was forced to miss a few days work. Lorraine could not recall anyone besides George as ever catching for the troupe, but Sue recalled that George did allow Hank Robbins to



**The Flying Romanas, Roy and Mary Valentine, doing a break-away in 1944. Pfening Archives.**

catch for them when he was laid up. Hank must have filled in for George on this occasion. Hank had had experience working for Art Concello's troupes, and he remained a close friend of the Valentine family for many years. In August Sue was fined \$4 for missing spec eight times. No doubt Sue voluntarily forfeited the money rather than appear in the spec for she has always been a very unassuming person in spite of the fact that she was an outstanding circus performer.<sup>46</sup>

They opened a season of Shrine shows with Polack Bros. on September 3 in San Diego, and followed with dates in Texas, Colorado, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Iowa and Illinois. Closing with Polack Bros. in Davenport, Iowa on December 5, they traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana and visited Harry LaVan at Pontchartrain Beach, where Harry had been running a booking agency since his retirement from his flying act.<sup>47</sup>

In 1943 Fred Valentine's troupe played the Cleveland Grotto Circus with the Flying Behees and the Flying Harolds. Bill Valentine left the troupe to fill in for one date with Charles Siegrist's troupe at Fort William, Ontario. The Valentines played the Delphi Fair at Fort Wayne, Indiana; the General Motors Picnic at Kokomo, Indiana; the

McLean County Fair in Bloomington, Illinois and the Converse, Indiana fair. Near the end of the season they played at the Cleveland International Thrill Circus with the Romanas and the Charles Siegrist troupe.<sup>48</sup>

The Romanas toured with Russell Bros. in 1943. They were with Orrin Davenport's circus in Lansing, Michigan and the Cleveland International Thrill Circus with the Flying Valentines as mentioned above.<sup>49</sup>

The Valentinos began 1944 with Polack Bros. Circus playing Shrine dates and continued into the fair season with Tom Packs' Thrill Circus. *Billboard* called them "an excellent closer" for the Polack show in Cincinnati. In Chicago "blond Sue" missed a trick, falling into the net, and "as she clung precariously to the edge, first one pin and then another folded under her and she narrowly escaped injury." This may have been the incident which Sue tells us once caused her a kidney injury when she missed a passing trick and fell into the net. The Valentino itinerary for 1944 included stops in Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Tennessee and Georgia. While with the Tom Packs show they were performing along with brothers, Fred and Bill's Flying Valentines, and brother Roy's Flying Romanas. In July the Valentinos spent two weeks vacation visiting Bert Doss (formerly of the Flying Thrillers and Flying Burtons) at Circus Park in Bloomington, Illinois before rejoining the Tom Packs show in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Closing at Kansas City in December they returned to Houston for the holidays.<sup>50</sup>

That year brother Fred's Flying Valentines played New Orleans' first indoor circus with Ray Bros. Circus. As mentioned before, they played the Tom Packs Thrill Circus dates with the Valentinos, and closed at Kansas City.<sup>51</sup>

A *Billboard* article dated February 26 stated that the Romanas were working the Cleveland Grotto Circus and would continue the season playing the Ed Williams Hippodrome Circus at Roanoke, Virginia; Shrine shows at St. Paul, Minnesota and Lansing, Michigan; the St. Louis Police Circus and three more indoor dates in the South. After that

they were expected to join Harlacker's Thrill Circus playing eastern fairs in summer. At this time they were advertising a passing leap with both flyers blindfolded. The Cleveland date was played along with Harold Voise's Flying Harolds. They played Barnes Carruthers dates with George and Fred's flying acts as mentioned before, and when the show played in Detroit Mary took a bad fall and was replaced for a time by Peggy Sheperd. Mary was hospitalized with possible internal injuries.<sup>52</sup>

The Valentinos were scheduled to perform with the Eagles Circus in Toledo in 1945 but were unable to play the engagement because of space limitations. They joined the Polack show in Cincinnati along with the Ward-Bell troupe. In Galveston, Texas they played the Ray Bros. Circus along with a flying act presented by Frankie Lou Woods. A *Billboard* article dated March 10 stated that they would play for Bob Morton in Chicago and for Barnes Carruthers at the Detroit Olympia Circus. In March they played the Police Circus in Wichita, Kansas for Hamid-Morton; an engagement in Washington, D. C.; and the Chicago date mentioned above. All three Valentine troupes were together once again for the Chicago performance, where *Billboard* described the act as having "great flash." They followed with the Rink Wright show in Omaha, Nebraska; Tom Packs Police Show in Pittsburgh, June 18-23; the Moola Temple Shrine Show at Public Schools Stadium in St. Louis, again playing with the Flying Valentines, July 1-4; Evansville, Indiana, July 6-8; Knoxville, July 10-15; Redbird Stadium in Columbus, Ohio, July 18-22; and again with the Flying Valentines for Tom Packs in Nashville, July 25-29. They played three dates at Buckeye Lake, Ohio with three performances Memorial Day at 4:00, 8:30 and 11:00 PM. They finished the year out playing: Detroit, Norfolk, Baltimore, Washington, D. C., Rochester, New York and Portland, Maine.

The Rochester date was booked with Orrin Davenport in the New York State Armory; the Portland date was an Elks circus for Frank Wirth.<sup>53</sup>

The Flying Valentines played the Chicago and St. Louis dates along with the Valentinos as mentioned before,



This is the inside of the training barn owned by George Valentine in Normal, Illinois. Valentine collection.

and following two weeks vacation in Bloomington they joined Wirth's Circus in Washington, D. C.<sup>54</sup>

The Romas played the North Alabama State Fair in Florence, Alabama and the Tennessee Valley Fair at Lawrenceburg in August. After following the southern fair circuit through Panama City, Florida and Dothan, Alabama as a free attraction for the Johnny J. Jones Exposition they were to open with Gran Circo Atayde Hernandos in Mexico City for six weeks in early December, touring Central and South America. The troupe consisted of Roy, Mary and Benny Gibson.<sup>55</sup> This was the first year on the road for Bill Valentine's new act, the Flying LaVals. They began the season with Bill Valentine catching, Carl Leake and Frances Estes. Carl developed resin poisoning and Roy Valentine filled in for him since Mary had broken a collar bone. Bill's son, Bill Jr. had worked with the Flying Valentines since the age of 14. He now continued working with his father's act whenever it did not conflict with his education.<sup>56</sup>

*Billboard* magazine covered the St. Louis Police Show April 27, 1946 stating that the "Flyers Sell It." The Valentinos, performing with the Ward-Bell flyers, "got together on their timing to offer an aerial number" so that both acts could be watched well, "and they finished with an over-and-under together." This was in strong contrast to the year before when the Valentinos had

worked with Fred and Roy's flying acts. Lorraine stated that the brothers did not work well together at all, always trying to upstage one another. The Valentinos were good friends with the Ward-Bells and co-operated well. Evidently the strong feelings of rivalry did not exist outside the family and the Valentinos were able to co-operate for the good of the performance. They played the St. Louis Police Circus May 5. Whenever a flying act played this date they did not

use a regular rigging. The trapeze bars were hung from cables strung across the rafters at the top of the stadium. It was an impressive spectacle from below although it was a long climb for the catcher to the catch bar hand-over-hand and the cables swayed and bobbed as the flyers swung off; a scary sensation at best. During the Omaha Shrine Circus in June George was injured somehow but hoped to be back with the act soon. Lorraine did not recall the incident but Sue did remember that George had injured his wrist once and he had to call Hank Robbins in to catch for him. They followed with a performance at Lake Park, Canton, Ohio, September 2-5. They played the Police Field Day Celebration in Detroit, August 3; the Ohio State fair; the Montgomery County Fair in Dayton, Ohio, September 2-5 and the Rochester, New York Shrine Circus, November 11-16. *Billboard* stated that "The Valentino flying act is the best we've seen in a long time."<sup>57</sup>

The only reference found about the Flying Valentines in the 1946 *Billboards* was the statement in the April 27 issue that Fred's act was a feature of the Barnes Carruthers Circus in Chicago for 23 days in April along with Bob Fisher's Fearless Flyers and the Flying Hartzells.

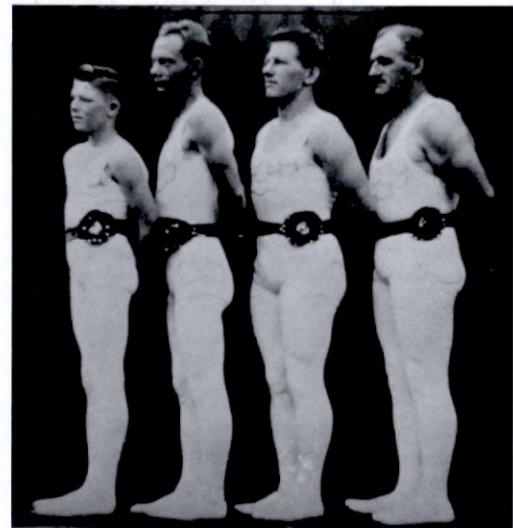
There were numerous references to the Flying Romas once again, however, beginning with E. N. Williams Hippodrome Show at Shreveport, Louisiana where Roy was injured in a fall when the pedestal board "gave way." He suffered a broken hand, and face and body

bruises. The act continued with Pat, Mary and Charles Wayne. They played Edgewater Park in Detroit in May; Larry Sunrock's rodeo at Wrigley Field in Chicago in July; and played all the Tom Packs Circus dates throughout the season.<sup>58</sup>

Once again the Flying LaVal troupe consisted of Bill Valentine, Betty York and Carl Lake that year.

The Flying Valentinos were again back with Polack Bros. show along with the Ward-Bell troupe in February. Thereafter they appeared in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Illinois. Evidently the Valentinos' salary was determined by the engagement rather than the number of days worked. Their salary for the two day stand at Archbold, Ohio, for instance, was contracted for \$400 while the one week engagement for Klein's Attractions in August was booked for \$450. Contracts with the Valentinos generally called for two performances and the girls often performed singles or doubles acts as well.<sup>59</sup>

This was probably the year that Low-



The Flying LaVals in 1950. Ray Valentine Jr., Carl Leake, Bill Valentine Jr., and Bill Valentine Sr. Valentine collection.

ell Sherer recalls witnessing an unusual spectacle with the show at the Coliseum in Chicago while catching for Fred's act. There was in attendance a large group of deaf children seated in the balcony at about the same level as the trapeze act. Each time the announcer introduced the stunts the flying act

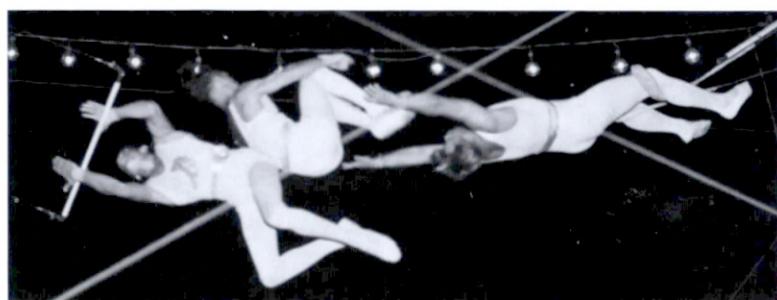
would perform (the Valentinos and the Flying Valentines working together on this date) they received a healthy round of applause. From the catchbar and from the pedestal board George and Fred announced the trick again hand signing, to yet another, even louder round of applause from their special audience. While working with Billy Ward's troupe the following year in Omaha, Jim Olson also witnessed George signing to a special audience of deaf children.<sup>60</sup>

Late in 1947 George bought the Happy Acres stable at 401 North Grove Street in Normal, Illinois, an eight acre property, for the purpose of establishing "George Valentine's Circus Haven." The Y.M.C.A. had dismantled its trapeze rigging a few years earlier and George's intention was to create a new center for practicing circus acts of all kinds, and restore the Bloomington-Normal community to its former status as a great center for circus training. The Valentinos established residence on this property and George set to work remodeling the stable for trapeze practice. The barn measured 40 feet across and 160 feet long.<sup>61</sup>

As mentioned before, Fred Valentine's act worked along with the Valentinos at the Chicago Stadium for Barnes Carruthers, according to Lowell Sherer, who had replaced Jack Bray as catcher for the Flying Valentines that year. Both Valentine troupes worked the outside rings while the Flying Zacchinis occupied the middle. Some of the old animosity between these two brothers might have lingered yet. There was certainly a strong rivalry between them. Still, they were brothers and like all brothers they must have felt the kind of affection for one another that only family kinship can foster. Lowell states that watching the two brothers signing to a balcony full of deaf children was "really something."<sup>62</sup>

The Flying Romas opened the outdoor season with the Roy Rogers-Tom Packs Thrill Circus in New York June 15, and went on to play dates at Columbus, Louisville, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Knoxville. Following that they played fair dates for the Ernie Young Booking

Agency. Mary recovered from an accident which she had sustained a year before and returned to the act in September. They played the Canadian National Exposition in Toronto and continued for several weeks playing fair dates before beginning indoor engagements. On Labor Day at the Toronto date Mary suffered a ruptured appendix but was back with the act by November. They bought a new Buick Roadster sedan in Detroit.



**The Flying Valentines doing a passing leap in 1947. Fred Valentine, Don Northdorf and Lowell Valentine collection.**

At this time their permanent address was Box 112, Bloomington, Illinois. Mary was advertised as the "only girl flyer successfully accomplishing an actual wrist caught Double Somersault, Blindfolded or otherwise--two people blindfolded under and over passing leap." Since Lorraine was now doing a two-and-a-half in a sack with the Valentinos, Roy may have been trying to take the upper hand by advertising Mary's blindfolded double as an exclusive stunt. Evidently he made a distinction between a blindfolded trick and a sack trick. The "or otherwise" remark leaves something for interpretation. The Romas also advertised themselves doing clown numbers. They played the Kansas City Shrine Circus from November 10-16. In November they purchased a two ton truck to haul their equipment. It was reported that they planned to vacation in California with friends on the Roy Rogers Rodeo.<sup>63</sup>

The first reference to Bill Valentine's new act, the Flying LaVals, is found in the *Billboard* of December 6, 1947 with the statement that he would be returning home to Houston after a season of fair dates. His troupe consisted of himself; his son, Bill Jr.; Betty Richardson and

Carl Leake. Bill constructed his rigging on his front yard at 947 West 21st Street in Houston, where he had lived since 1943. They planned to tour the carnival circuit. A *Houston Press* article on February 19 stated that Bill Jr. was a local high school hero. Carl Leake was formerly a professional diver before Bill broke him in as a flyer. This was the year Bill Valentine Jr. graduated from high school. He worked the next three seasons with his father's act before joining the Army in 1951.

The Flying Valentinos itinerary for 1948 included Shrine and other sponsored circuses, and fairs in Connecticut, Tennessee, Nebraska, Washington D.C., Missouri, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, Colorado and Texas. Lorraine had been performing most of the season in a "delicate condition." She stated that she worked into her seventh month of pregnancy when, while performing in a small town in Illinois, she heard a young boy shout from the ground below, "Hey! I know somebody's in a family way." They called in Mickey King to fill in for her for the rest of the season. Lorraine developed the closest of friendships with her childhood heroine, Mickey. Mickey had to leave them before the Houston Shrine date early in November to fulfill her own contracts, and George called in Jack Murphy for the Houston and Fort Worth engagements. Jack was a tall thin flyer who, before this, had only worked comedy (duplicating stunts which Bones Brown had developed). George insisted that Jack work "straight." He wouldn't have a clown in the act. Lorraine had herself asked George to let her clown with the act on previous occasions, but this did not comply with George's conception of a high class flying act (perhaps another indication of the influence which the Codonas had had on George). Murphy surprised everyone, doing a superb job of flying without comedy.<sup>64</sup>

On December 5, 1948 Cherie Valentine was born, the only child of George and Lorraine. Within six months the proud father had her hanging from a

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Photo by John Polacsek

minature ring set "working out." George insisted that she should be called "Cheree," daughter of the famous "LaRayne."<sup>65</sup>

The Flying Valentine troupe of 1948 was made up of Fred Valentine, Lowell Sherer and Don Northdorf. When Lowell married Mary Stevens she left the Ringling show to join them. In winter they worked in Denver and West Texas with Clyde Bros. Circus as mentioned in the *Billboard* of March 6. They were with the Wirth Circus in Syracuse in April and followed with the Barnes Carruthers Circus in Chicago along with the Romas and Zacchinis. After that they were working for Tom Packs at the St. Louis Police show and for Hamid-Morton at Philadelphia along with the Romas and the Flying Wards (Harold Ward and Gus Bell's second act which worked independently while the Ward-Bells were on the Polack show). Lowell and Mary left the act at the end of the year. Lowell had broken in with Harry LaMar a few years earlier but had had an argument with Harry during practice at the Y.M.C.A. and was hired by Fred right out of the locker room. It seems that George Valentine had overheard the argument and, knowing that Fred was looking for a good catcher, he went directly to the phone to call his brother. When Lowell went down to the locker room the phone was off the hook and Fred was on the other end of the line with a proposition for Lowell which promised a higher salary (one reason why Harry always seemed to be breaking new people in on his act was because he paid his people a very low salary). Lowell again worked with the LaMars in the 1950s. He later formed his own troupe, the Flying Corderos.<sup>66</sup>

The Romas played for Hamid-Morton in Wichita and Kansas City along with the Flying Hartzells; for Barnes Carruthers in Chicago along with the Flying Valentines as mentioned before; with the Columbus, Ohio Grotto Circus; with the Montreal Police show for Hamid-Morton; continuing with Hamid-Morton in Philadelphia along with the Flying Valentines and Flying Wards; and they worked the Boston Shrine show before closing with Hamid-Morton in Atlanta November 17. Their

catcher that season was Mike Malko, formerly with the Ward-Bell troupes. Mike later formed his own group, the Flying Malkos. *Billboard* also stated that Roy had bought a new 1949 Lincoln Cosmopolitan sedan while with Hamid-Morton that season.<sup>67</sup> The Flying LaVals toured with Ward Bros. Circus in Minnesota and Wisconsin before playing indoor Shrine dates. They toured with Clyde Bros. Circus that fall with Bill Sr., Bill Jr., Del Graham, and a girl flyer. Del Graham later broke in David and Rick Nelson of the Ozzie and Harriet television show on the trapeze.<sup>68</sup>

The Valentinos began the 1949 season with Barnes Bros. Circus in Chicago, April 22-May 7 with the Flying Du-

for about three weeks work while five days in Huntington brought \$450 (minus ten per cent agent's commission). Three weeks in Pittsburgh brought a salary of \$857.50, and for the Omaha Shrine Circus, where the Valentinos were a favorite attraction, they took home \$600 for one week. Ten days for Tom Packs in New Orleans brought a salary of \$925. Presumably the salary was determined by the law of supply and demand as much as any other factor.<sup>69</sup>

The Flying Valentines worked Dave Malcomb's Cavalcade of Stars at Fort Wayne. They worked part of the season with Orrin Davenport's show along with the Flying Harolds (Harold Voise's troupe) in the winter months and with

Tom Packs Circus in New Orleans along with the Flying Duwards.<sup>70</sup>

The Romas worked for Hamid-Morton that season. In February they were in Memphis for two special matinees for "colored folks," and in April Mike Malko was injured when the net broke under him, which required three stitches to his head.<sup>71</sup>

That year the LaVals worked El Gran Circo Espanol Arriola in Mexico City and later they were working with Ward Bros. Circus in Long Beach. Carl Leake dropped out and was replaced by Eddie Milam. Eddie had broken in with Harry LaVan in Louisiana. The troupe consisted of Bill Sr., Bill Jr. and Eddie Milam who had worked a few months before being replaced by Ray Valentine.<sup>72</sup>

The Flying Valentinos itinerary for 1950 included appearances in Nebraska, Alabama, Missouri, Wisconsin, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, West Virginia and Illinois.

At most of these stands the Valentinos worked for a flat salary of \$400-450 (less agent's ten percent) regardless of the number of days at each stand although at Hazard, Kentucky they were paid \$600 for one day's work.

Fred's troupe worked for Hamid-Morton for three weeks; following with two weeks in Palisades Park, Palisades, New Jersey; two weeks with the Westbury, Connecticut Shrine show and two weeks at Belmont Park, Montreal. At this time Dave Abbott, a former Holly-



**The Flying Romas in the early 1950s. Ray Valentine, Jeep Milam, Mary Valentine and Mike Malko. Valentine collection.**

wards (Billy Ward's troupe) and the Zacchinis at the Chicago Stadium. They followed with appearances in Nebraska, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky and Louisiana. The larger shows didn't necessarily bring in larger salaries for the Valentinos. The Chicago engagement brought in \$1,300



**The Valentino Sisters, Sue Pelto and Lorraine Valentine in the mid 1950s. Valentine collection.**

wood stunt man, joined them as a catcher.

The Romas played the fair season with Ward Bros. Circus and worked for the third consecutive year with Hamid-Morton. They played dates in Boston, Atlanta, Toronto and Philadelphia. The troupe consisted of Roy, Mary and Ralph Oseyth catching.<sup>73</sup>

In 1950 the LaVals played the St. Louis Police Circus along with the La-Mars. They also worked with Tom Packs that year and at the Elgin State Hospital show. The troupe consisted of Bill Sr., Bill Jr., Ray Valentine and Virginia Schider. The following year Bill Jr. joined the army and Ray became the principal flyer in the act.<sup>74</sup>

This chronology ends with the year 1950 when George retired from performing due to a heart condition. Thus ended the far-flung travels of the Flying Valentinos. When daughter Cherie showed Lorraine the extensive listing of cities in which they had worked over the years Lorraine herself was amazed. "Gee, did I really go to all those places?" As anyone could guess, a life on the road was not an easy one. It takes more than a pursuit of money and fame

to persevere year after year under such conditions. It takes dedication to the profession. Through it all the Valentinos maintained a high standard of professional excellence. Sue Pelto worked the 1951 season with Lowell and Mary Sherer on one of Bob Fisher's acts. She broke her ankle in a rigging accident during that tour and had to work part of that season with a cast on her leg. She still recalls the sound it made when they performed the passing trick and her cast struck the flybar each time. In 1952 Lorraine and Sue began performing a new double trapeze and bar act along with Cherie, on a special portable rigging. They worked this "Valentino Sisters" act for seven years. After this act broke up daughter Cherie performed a single act until 1964. In 1973 Cherie met Jim Cunningham, a trombone player with the Beatty show, while visiting the circus. They were married the following year. While she and Jim were married Cherie worked various positions with the show including sideshow acts such as "Miss Electra" and snake charming. Since she and Jim split up she has worked concessions on various circuses and is at present with the Big Apple Circus.

Though several performers did use the Valentine barn for practice for many years George's dream of establishing a circus haven in Normal, Illinois did not work out. He had technical problems. The stables in the barn were actually part of the roof support and could not be removed. The trapeze rigging barely fit into the barn. The city would not allow George a permit to park travel trailers on his property. The city which had been home to so many famous circus personalities simply was not their home any longer. Lowell and Mary Sherer did maintain a flying act in Bloomington with their two sons, Jim and Shane, and their ace flyer Manuel Cordero until 1984, but with that exception, the circus people had all sought more hospitable climates in which to work. George Valentine died in 1955 leaving his dream and a most

impressive career behind him.

Fred Valentine retired in 1964 after having worked with his flying act for over 30 years. He died in 1969. Of his two sons, Fred Jr. and Charles, only Charles had worked with the flying act for one season. Some of the personnel who had worked with the Flying Valentines through the years were: Ben Gibson, Lowell and Mary Sherer, Don Northdorff, Dave Abbott, Donald Winters, Mary Perry, Barbara Winters, Claire LeVine and Gail Bailey.<sup>75</sup>

Roy and Mary Valentine continued to present the Flying Romas act for several years. When they split up Mary formed a flying act with Eddie Kohl which they called the Maryeddies, and later she was with the Marilees.

Bill Valentine's adopted son, Ray "Slick" Valentine worked with his step-father's act for many years beginning in 1944 when he was eight years old. At that time he was the youngest flyer in the business. In 1957 Bill retired and Ray formed his own troupe which he called the Flying Valentines. Ray's troupe spent six consecutive seasons with Polack Bros. Circus and seven years with Herbert Castle, as well as working with other major Shrine circuses. Ray's wife Debbie was also with his flying act as was their son Ray Jr. who was already performing with the act at the age of 5 in 1964. At one time Ray teamed up with his brother-in-law Billy Del Woods to form the Ray-Dels flying act, which worked for several seasons with Cristiani Bros. Circus. The Ray-Dels were an unusual flying act in that both Ray and Billy could work as both flyers and catchers, an unusual combination. When they went their separate ways Ray went back to calling his act the Flying Valentines and Billy formed his own troupe which he called the Flying Dels. The Ray-Dels worked together for three-and-a-half years.<sup>76</sup>

At the age of nine Ray Valentine Jr. was the youngest flyer in history to perform a triple somersault to a hand catch. The Flying Valentine act (Ray's act) experimented with variations on the triple including a triple return to the flybar from the hands of the catcher and a triple caught by the catcher using a stick. Ray Jr. was also the first person in history to perform a triple somersault to a hand catch blindfolded. His

first wife Dianne was one of the few women flyers to consistently complete a triple somersault to a hand catch. Ray Jr.'s second wife Michelle LeMoines of the German family of motorcycle performers still performs with his flying act. Ray Sr. retired from trapeze work seven years ago, after 34 years performing in every major circus in the country and in every country in the western world. Later he returned for five months filling in for another catcher for a flying act touring Japan. At one time he caught for the famous Gaona troupe. He now owns and operates Circus Valentine and presents the Royal Australian Circus for its Houston engagement. Ray Jr., like his father, is a flyer for his own troupe, which has been touring with an ice show in the South. His act still features the innovations on the triple somersault which they developed over the years. Bill Valentine, Jr. worked the Flying LaVals on and off until his father retired the act. He now buys and sells industrial sewing machines.

After retiring from the Valentinos Sisters act Sue Pelto worked for a while for Eureka Williams in Bloomington, Illinois and for Illinois State University in Normal. While working as custodian in the dormitories she often liked to exercise after hours to keep in shape, and on one occasion she surprised a young co-ed who stumbled into the shower room late at night to find Sue hanging from her heels in one of the shower stalls. Thereafter she was called on from time to time to perform various stunts for the amusement of the students. With characteristic modesty, she was flattered when asked to attend a practice of the Illinois State University Gamma Phi Circus and gave the student performers pointers. Sue now lives in Venice, Florida where she keeps fit by walking, biking and swimming for miles each day.

For a while after retiring from trapeze work Lorraine booked various acts in Peoria, Illinois and other places in the Bloomington vicinity. She worked for ten years at Bloomington's State Farm Insurance Corporation, becoming the first employee to work beyond the age of 65.<sup>77</sup> In later years she enjoyed participating in radio and television interviews discussing her circus career. After



**The Flying Ray-Dels on Cris-tiani Bros. Circus in 1958. Left to right. Ray Valentine Jr., Barbara Williams (Woodcock), Rosalina Valentine and Billy Woods. Pfening photo.**

Gracie Genders died Lorraine and Tuffy struck up a warm relationship. Although Lorraine never remarried after George's death Tuffy was the most important man in her life in later years.

The Valentine barn was bought by Illinois State University in 1962 for a storage facility. It is the only indoor practice site left standing today in that community. Last year the university proposed installing a soccer field on this site. A small group of citizens appealed to the administration to preserve the barn for its historical importance. The university still plans to construct the soccer field, but has no plans to destroy the building at present.

Lorraine spent her last years at her home on Clinton Blvd. in Bloomington enjoying the company of her pet cat, and keeping in close contact with old circus friends such as Mickey King, Sue Pelto, Tuffy Genders, Art Concello, Jim Olson, Howard Waters, Lowell and Mary Sherer, Manuel Cordero and Bob Handley, to mention just a few. She was a true friend to all circus people, for the circus is one large family world-wide.

During the last years of her life I was fortunate to know Lorraine personally, and through this association with her I feel that I am a part of that family as well. As much as we miss her there were few long faces at the visitation for Lorraine's funeral, for you couldn't think of her without recalling how much happiness she had brought us in life. Her energy, her enthusiasm and her positive attitude were an inspiration to her many good friends. Her memory will continue to bring us happiness for many years to come.

#### Footnotes

1. Information courtesy of the McLean County Historical Society. Interview with Lorraine Valentine October 19, 1986. Interview with Walt Graybeal January 6, 1987.
2. Correspondence with Sue Pelto January 26, 1987.
3. Photograph, Cherie Valentine Collection.
4. Interview with Harold Genders March 3, 1987.
5. Photograph, Cherie Valentine Collection.
6. *Billboard*, May 24, 1930, p. 94. Interview with Mickey King February 9, 1987.
7. Interview with Elizabeth Valentine March 11, 1987.
8. Interview with Lorraine Valentine and Sue Pelto February 9, 1985 Correspondence with Sue Pelto January 26, 1987.
9. Interview with Lorraine Valentine February 8, 1985.
10. Schoepfel, Gary, *The Bloomington-Normal Magazine*, "Kicking Sawdust, Part III, Try Try Again," p. 16. Bloomington, Illinois *Daily Pantagraph*, June 26, 1941, p. 18; Interview with Harold Genders March 3, 1987.
11. Interview with Lorraine Valentine, January 1985.
12. Interview with Lorraine Valentine, February 9, 1985; Schoepfel, p. 19.
13. *Billboard*, February 11, 1933, p. 28. *Billboard*, January 4, 1941, p. 49. Interview with Lorraine Valentine, March 1986.
14. Interview with Lorraine Valentine, February 19, 1985.
15. Letter dated January 20, 1933, Cherie Valentine Collection.
16. *Billboard*, April 21, 1934, p. 52; Interview with Lorraine Valentine, February 18, 1985.
17. Interview with Walt Graybeal, February 10, 1987.
18. Article, Lorraine Valentine Scrapbook.
19. Interview with Cherie Valentine February 7, 1987. Interview with Geraldine Horton, March 11, 1987.
20. Correspondence with Sue Pelto, January 26, 1987.
21. *Daily Pantagraph*, March 14, 1937. Interview with Lorraine Valentine, January 1986.
22. Art Concello, on viewing film of the Valentine flying act, summer 1986.
23. Interview with Jim Olson, January 13, 1987. Interview with Lowell Sherer, January 14, 1987.
24. Interview with Walt Graybeal, February 9, 1987.

25. Correspondence with Sue Pelto, January 26, 1987.

26. *Billboard*, April 25, 1936, p. 61. *Billboard*, May 2, 1936, p. 2; May 9, 1936, p. 38. Article, Lorraine Valentine Scrapbook. *Billboard*, November 7, 1936, p. 38.

27. *Billboard*, July 18, 1936, p. 36. Carson, Donald R. and Luth, Perry Sr., *Bandwagon*, "The Frank J. Walter Circus Collection," p. 29. Interview with Geraldine Horton March 11, 1987.

28. *Billboard*, June 6, 1937, p. 38; February 20, 1937, p. 40; February 27, 1937, p. 32. *Billboard*, February 19, 1938, p. 33.

29. *Billboard*, June 18, 1938, p. 32. Article, Lorraine Valentine Scrapbook; correspondence with Sue Pelto March 21, 1987. *Billboard*, June 18, 1938, p. 32; Interview with Lorraine Valentine, October 12, 1986.

30. *Billboard*, March 26, 1938, p. 36. *Billboard*, September 24, 1938, p. 40. *Billboard*, May 21, 1938, p. 34; June 4, 1938, p. 34. *Billboard*, September 24, 1938, p. 40; September 10, 1938, p. 30. *Billboard*, October 29, 1938, p. 32; December 3, 1938, p. 32 & 33.

31. Interview with Lorraine Valentine and Sue Pelto, February 9, 1985. Program, Keokuk Street Fair, 1939.

32. *Billboard*, July 29, 1939, p. 32.

33. Interview with Lorraine Valentine, June 1986. *Billboard*, January 14, 1939, p. 36; February 11, 1939, p. 34; February 18, 1939, p. 34; April 8, 1939, p. 46; July 1, 1939, p. 34; August 19, 1939, p. 32; September 9, 1939, p. 32.

34. *Billboard*, October 26, 1940, p. 41.

35. *Billboard*, June 20, 1944, p. 33; September 30, 1950, p. 57. Interview with Doris Valentine, February 16, 1987.

36. *Billboard*, January 13, 1940, p. 34; February 10, 1940, p. 32; February 17, 1940, p. 31; March 2, 1940, p. 30; March 16, 1940, p. 34; March 30, 1940, p. 32.; June 22, 1940, p. 32; June 29, 1940, p. 35; July 27, 1940, p. 46; August 3, 1940, p. 34; August 10, 1940, p. 33; September 7, 1940, p. 60 September 28, 1940, p. 44; October 26, 1940, p. 41; November 30, 1940, p. 32 & 85; December 21, 1940, p. 39.

37. Interview with Lorraine Valentine and Sue Pelto, February 9, 1985.

38. Article, Lorraine Valentine Scrapbook; Interview with Lorraine Valentine February 9, 1985; *Billboard*, May 31, 1941, p. 45.

39. Article, Lorraine Valentine Scrapbook.

40. *Billboard*, November 29, 1941, p. 51.

41. *Billboard*, February 15, 1941, p. 41; March 15, 1941, p. 40; May 10, 1941, p. 47; July 26, 1941, p. 46; August 30, 1941, p. 57; September 20, 1941, p. 55; October 18, 1941, p. 53; November 29, 1941, p. 51.

42. *Billboard*, March 28, 1942, Special Attractions Section, p. 8.

43. *Billboard*, May 9, 1942, p. 49.

44. *Billboard*, October 3, 1942, p. 44. December 5, 1942, p. 38; December 12, 1942, p. 39; December 19, 1942, p. 38.

45. Interview with Lorraine Valentine, November 12, 1986.

46. Contract dated April 1, 1943, Cherie Valentine Collection. Correspondence with Sue Pelto, January 26, 1987. *Billboard*, July 17, 1943, p. 44; August 21, 1943, p. 38. Interview with Sue Pelto, Jan. 12, 1987. Russell Bros. Circus receipt dated August 26, 1943, Cherie Valentine Collection.

47. *Billboard*, December 11, 1943, p. 39.

48. *Billboard*, January 30, 1943, p. 38; September 4, 1943, p. 55; October 16, 1943.

49. *Billboard*, February 27, 1943, p. 37; April 10, 1943, p. 46; October 16, 1943.

50. *Billboard*, February 26, 1944, p. 47. Article, Lorraine Valentine Scrapbook; Interview with Sue Pelto, February 9, 1985. *Billboard*, July 29, 1944, p. 45; December 2, 1944, p. 36; December 16, 1944, p. 43.

51. *The White Tops*, April-May 1944, p. 21.

52. *Billboard*, February 26, 1944, p. 47; June 2, 1944, p. 44; June 9, 1944, p. 43.

53. *Billboard*, February 15, 1945, p. 48 & 49; February 24, 1945, p. 48; April 28, 1945, p. 35; June 16, 1945, p. 45; July 7, 1945, p. 64; August 11, 1945, p. 41; November 27, 1945, p. 55; December 15, 1945, p. 55.

54. *Billboard*, October 20, 1945, p. 55.

55. *Billboard*, August 18, 1945, p. 36; October 6, 1945, p. 54; November 10, 1945, p. 54.

56. Interview with Bill Valentine Jr., April 7, 1987.

57. *Billboard*, July 6, 1945, p. 77. Interview with Lorraine Valentine, November 13, 1986. Interview with Jim Olson and Walt Graybeal, November 13, 1986. Interview with Sue Pelto, January 12, 1987. *Billboard*, July 6, 1946, p. 77; *Buckeye* of Archbold, Ohio, July 30, 1947, p. 1. *Billboard*, November 30, 1946, p. 50.

58. *Billboard*, March 2, 1946, p. 61; March 2, 1946, p. 63; May 4, 1946, p. 87; July 6, 1946, p. 50; July 13, 1946, p. 75.

59. *Billboard*, February 8, 1947, p. 46.

60. Interview with Lowell Sherer, January 14, 1987; Interview with Jim Olson, January 13, 1987. *Buckeye*, July 30, 1947, p. 1.

61. *Daily Pantograph*, December 5, 1947, p. 3; *Billboard*, January 10, 1948; *Daily Pantograph*, August 21, 1962, p. 5.

62. Interview with Lowell Sherer, February 21, 1987.

63. *Billboard*, June 7, 1947, p. 49; September 13, 1947, p. 54; November 15, 1947, p. 53 & 86.

64. Interview with Lorraine Valentine and Sue Pelto, February 9, 1985; Correspondence with Sue Pelto, January 26, 1987.

65. Interview with Mickey King and Sue Pelto, January 12, 1987.

66. Interview with Lowell Sherer, Feb. 21, 1987; *Billboard*, March 6, 1948, p. 50; April 10, 1948, p. 55; April 17, 1948, p. 53; May 22, 1948, p. 63.

67. Interview with Lowell Sherer, February 21, 1987; *Billboard*, March 26, 1948, p. 70; June 26, 1948, p. 61; October 2, 1948, p. 42; November 13, 1948, p. 65.

68. *Billboard*, June 26, 1948, p. 60. Bill Valentine Jr. interview April 7, 1987.

69. *Billboard*, April 9, 1949, p. 109; April 30, 1949, p. 67.

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71. *Billboard*, February 26, 1949, p. 57; April 2, 1949, p. 73; April 23, 1949, p. 69.

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73. *Billboard*, May 26, 1950, p. 53. *Battle Creek Enquirer*, Battle Creek Michigan, August 26, 1950. *Billboard*, May 13, 1950, p. 69; June 17, 1950, p. 66; September 30, 1950, p. 66.

74. *Billboard*, July 15, 1950, p. 38; September 16, 1950, p. 59. Bill Valentine interview April 7, 1987.

75. Interview with Elizabeth Valentine, March 11, 1987.

76. Interview with Ray Valentine Sr., February 16, 1987; Interview with Doris Valentine, February 16, 1987; *Chicago American*, March 5, 1964, p. 61.

77. Interview with Ray Valentine Sr., February 16, 1987. Interview with Bill Valentine Jr., April 7, 1987.; Interview with Sue Pelto, February 9, 1987.; *Daily Pantograph*, February 10, 1979.

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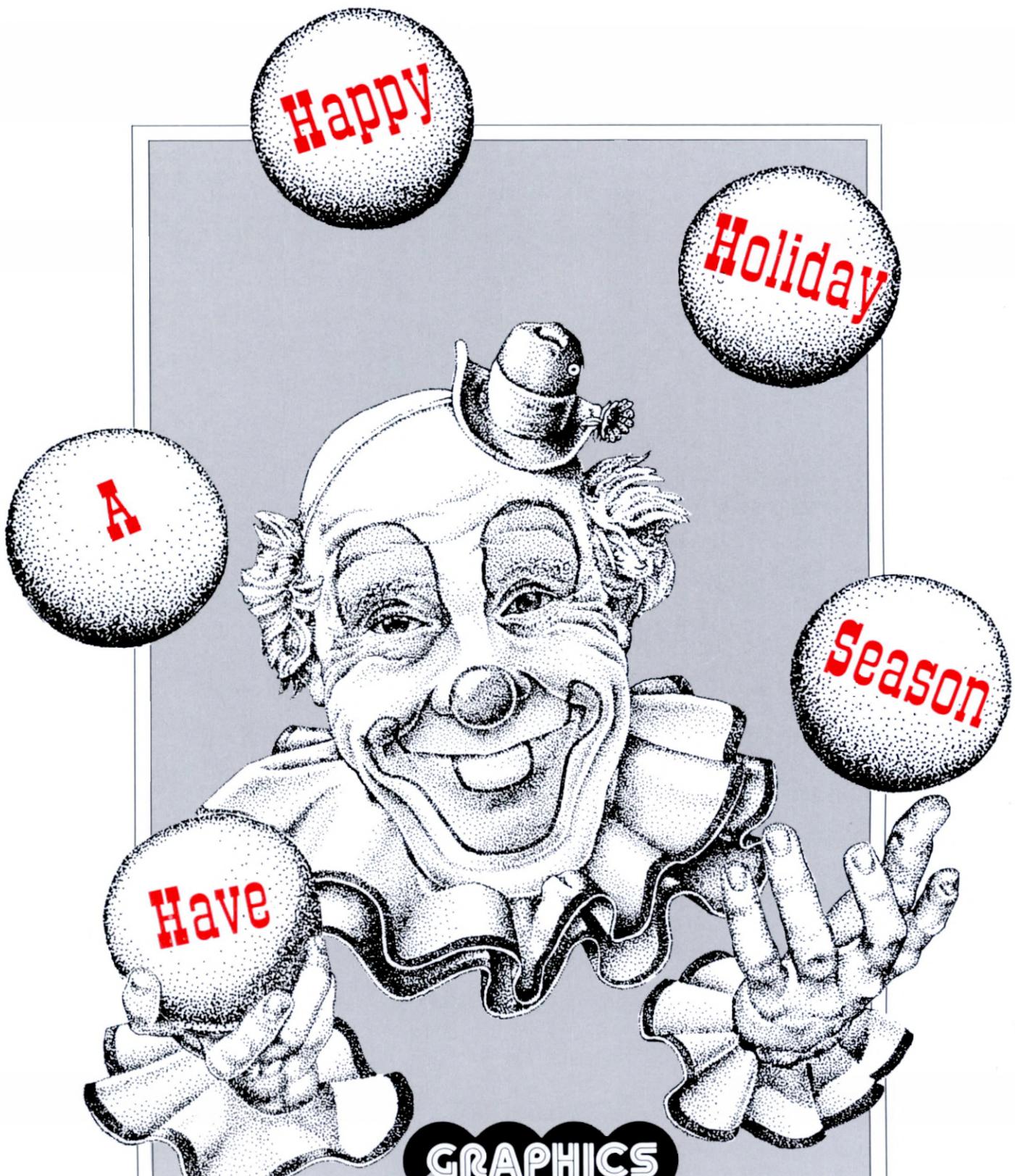


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# Only Big Show Coming

## Chapter 2 Part Two The 1877 and 1878 Seasons By Orin C. King

The first show of the season of 1877 for Topeka, and the opening exhibitions for the Great European Zoological Association, Museum, Royal Colosseum and Circus--better known as Sells Bros. Great Mastodon--occurred Monday and Tuesday, April 16 and 17 on a lot across the street from City Park, down by the Kansas River. The great European had spent the winter on the fair-grounds at Topeka, and that story is told elsewhere.

Adam Forepaugh was keenly aware of the approaching prominence of the Sells brothers and as soon as they announced their opening date Forepaugh launched his attack. "Await the Advent of the unapproachable, the Great Forepaugh Show. WILL EXHIBIT AT TOPEKA SOON." In an ad abutting that of the Sells Brothers, Forepaugh boasted of the "only living Male Hippopotamus!; three separate railroad trains, six performing elephants," and the great feature of his show--a baby elephant. "REMEMBER THE NAME 4 PAWS."

As soon as the Sells route became known, Forepaugh announced an identical route, day and date: Carbondale, April 18; Burlingame, April 19; Osage City, April 20; Malvern, April 21 and Ottawa, April 23.

Forepaugh was playing in North Carolina at the time and could not possibly have made any Kansas dates, but trouble for the Sells show was all he asked. Thanks to heavy rains, flooded creeks and abyssmal mud, the Great Mastodon had all the trouble it needed.

Distances were not great in the first moves of the season: Topeka to Carbondale, 17 miles; Carbondale to Burlingame, 9 miles; Burlingame to Osage City, 8 miles; Osage City to Malvern, 19 miles; Malvern to Ottawa, 21 miles. Although distances were short, road conditions made the moves long and all but impossible, damaging the equipment and exhausting man and beast.

When the show closed at Osage City, the brothers loaded it on 60 Santa Fe cars and jumped to Lawrence, 60 miles, blowing the date at Malvern (now called Melvern,) April 21. The posted route was resumed at Ottawa, April 23, an overland move of 28 miles. Forepaugh advertised in Ottawa papers that his show "four times bigger than the Largest Tented Exhibition on this Continent Will Soon Exhibit at Ottawa."

Forepaugh's ploy failed totally in Topeka and apparently was ineffective at Carbondale, Burlingame and Osage City, but may have had some effect on the Sells appearance in Ottawa.

The Ottawa *Republican*, April 26, reported: "For the first time in the history of Ottawa there was a small attendance at the circus Monday afternoon. The town appeared to be full of people, yet under the canvas there were hardly two hundred people. In the evening, a good crowd turned out, and we presume that taken altogether the show more than paid expenses. The circus was good, in fact one of the best that ever exhibited in this city, and their street parade is second only to that of Howes' [Great] London Circus, which was here a year ago. It is thought that

**Lewis Sells, whose show played Kansas in 1877. All illustrations from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise noted.**

the advertising of Forepaugh's show had something to do with keeping away a crowd."

A camel stopped in Valley Falls, June 5, and was fed "a few ears of thirty cent corn" according to the *Kansas New Era*, June 9. Lewis Sells was in charge of

the procession wending its way to St. Joseph, Missouri, to rejoin the Great Mastodon. The animal had suffered a broken jaw in a fight with another camel and had been left in Topeka when the show started for Carbondale. A man was sent back to Topeka to retrieve it, but he reported the camel had died. City Marshall Dustan found the beast wandering about Topeka Avenue. The marshall took charge and turned him loose in City Park. The injury healed and the camel became a great favorite with children. He would kneel on command and as many children as possibly could would climb on his back and go for a ride. "He could not be called beautiful but he was good," commented the *New Era*. The marshall refused to sell him for \$50, but turned him over to the circus when Lewis Sells called for him.

Forepaugh played Ottawa, Saturday, June 9, but for some unknown reason did not arrive until nearly 5 p. m. "It is

safe to say," reported the *Republican*, June 14, "that not less than six thousand people from the neighboring towns massed themselves in the city that day.

"Well, the circus trains didn't arrive on time, and the crowds waited. Waited patiently, as though they had come to see that show and meant to do it if they remained 'till Tilden got into the White House. They jammed, and surged, swayed to and fro in consolidated masses on the corners; they bubbled over the crowded walks into the streets; they filled stores and shops and offices with gaily decked femininity.

"Improvised amusements were not wanting--staid citizens and stiff muscled farmers, ran foot races for the delectation of the upper Main street depart-



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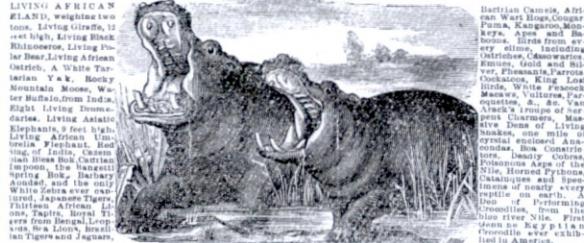
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The Great European Zoological Association, owned by the Sells brothers, played a number of Kansas dates in the spring of 1877.

ment; a youth, who by some inspiration ambled into town on a lilliputian donkey, won the eternal admiration of shouting hundreds by an amateur exhibition of mulemanship, and a trio of aborigines in red and brass for an hour or two diverted the crowd, and won 'cash-pop' galore by bow and arrow shooting at contributed nickel targets.

"From early morning until nearly five o'clock, this throng of people waited in dust and sunshine, good-natured, and patient. Nor was there an accident to chronicle, nor a disgraceful scene of disorder or drunkenness. It was simply an assembling of happy-hearted people on a gala-time bent. They appreciated the situation and would have had just as good a time if Adam Forepaugh had never existed."

But Adam Forepaugh did exist and he did exhibit in Ottawa, although there is no mention of a parade or a matinee. In

a separate column the *Republican* reviewed the performance: "The Forepaugh combination of bandy-legged tumblers and ostracized fakirs arrived in the city late Saturday afternoon and pitched its tent on the grounds of the Red Stocking Base Ball Club. It is quite unnecessary to assert that these grounds were never put to so base a use before. The show was well attended, probably not less than 3,500 people being crowded into the tent. We have scarcely patience to speak of the performance--it was farcical in every particular."

The reporter was perhaps angry at the long wait and directed his frustrations to the circus, for he was pleased by nothing except the menagerie which he found "quite equal to the best which frequent the West."

"There was nothing approaching a first class act during the entire evening performance--in fact the whole ring business was so farcical that our people who delighted in being humbugged, derived considerable amusement from the very pitifulness of the attempt of the lean and scant company to go through with their routine of abortive gyrations."

The reporter was also incensed that roving ticket sellers working away from the ticket windows charged the purchasers sixty cents instead of the advertised fifty. Quite possibly the reporter could not have been placated by Daniel in the lion's den.

Forepaugh played Wichita on June 11, and from there made an easy jump to Emporia on June 12. Press handouts made lengthy stories about the baby elephant born in Philadelphia on Friday February 1, 1877, and the Emporia *News* devoted nearly a column to the baby. The remainder of the column was taken up with an ad for "Baby's Best Friend," the most appropriate name for Dr. Bull's Baby Syrup. "It is absolutely free from opium, morphine and other powerful agents, etc."

The *News* reported June 15, that, "The

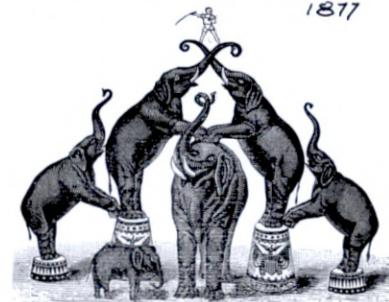
people rolled in, some coming fifteen and twenty miles, and there was quite an element in the crowd of that interesting animal who lock hands and eat gingerbread and buy kisses and ha ha at the funny poetry and then pass them off to their gals. The young men who run foot races along the sidewalks were also here, as well as the fellow who can whip, throw down or outrun anybody of his size in the county. The small Alecs who come on horseback were here, and there was old-fashioned times and lots of fun. Mr. Forepaugh has the largest and best display of animals we have seen since the old days of Van Amberg, when 'animal shows' were a specialty. The circus was medium. There were some good things, and the usual amount of dreary jumping through paper hoops, over dirty banners, riding on one leg, jumping over horses, stupid jokes by the clowns, etc., which have been the custom of all circuses for thirty years to our certain knowledge. The parade on the street was fair. We have seen better and worse."

The Forepaugh show appeared in Kansas in June 1877 featuring a baby elephant.

## THE Greatest Show On Earth

KEOKUK, SATURDAY, JUNE 23.

1877



## FOREPAUGH'S AGGREGATION!

With its Wealth of Attractions. The Largest, most Complete and Refined Zoological and Equestrian Organization in the World.

Endorsed by the Press and Sustained by the Public. Our Record in the Past a Guarantee for the Future.

THE ONLY SHOW OF ITS KIND THAT ABSOLUTELY EXHIBITS ALL IT ADVERTISES.

ALL BY RAIL | THE FINEST PRIVATE RAILWAY EQUIPAGE IN THE WORLD.

FACTS FOR THE PUBLIC:  
 The Forepaugh Show exhibits the only herd of SIX PERFORMING ELEPHANTS, the only LIVING MALE HIPPOPOTAMUS

The *News* reported that the show arrived on two trains. An estimated 2,000 attended the matinee with a smaller crowd in the evening.

"A gentlemen who made a careful estimate thinks the show took in about \$1,600. We understand their expenses are about \$1,000 per day. So father Adam cleared \$600, which was not a bad day's work."

Topeka papers were liberal with their columns and many handouts were published prior to show day, June 13. The baby elephant scored the most lines, but the hippo was a strong second. The *Blade*, June 7, reported, "It is the Great Behemoth of the Holy Bible, of whom the inspired writer Job, Says: 'Behold he drinketh up a river, and he hasteth not; he trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth. He taketh it with his eyes, his nose pierceth through snares.' It cost Mr. Forepaugh \$20,000 to secure this exceedingly rare animal. It sweats blood."

On Monday preceding the exhibition, the *Blade* ran a laudatory review of the show allegedly the opinion of the Rochester *Democrat*. On show day the *Blade* ran the story again, word for word, as a review of circus day in Topeka. The only variance came at the end where the *Blade* added the following: "The performances were witnessed this afternoon by at least three thousand people. The canvas under which is a large menagerie, is six hundred feet long and eighty-five wide; the circus [big top] is one hundred and seventy-five long and one hundred feet wide.

"We are under obligations to Mr. Whitney, of the Forepaugh show, for courtesies extended us this afternoon."

According to the *Commonwealth*, June 14, "The baby elephant, about 7 o'clock yesterday morning, picked up a little five year old shaver with his trunk and threw him to one side with a good deal of skill. It was just as the animals were being taken onto the ground at the corner of Monroe and North. The little fellow had evidently strayed from home determined to have the first sight of the show. No harm was done, but the child was terribly scared."

Any robberies that occurred in a town on show day were always blamed on the showmen. The *Commonwealth* reported, "Among the houses robbed the

night Forepaugh's circus was here were Mr. Picks, C. F. Kendall's, Jonathan Myers, Dr. Rogers and Mr. Shoup's. We heard of no great amount of plunder obtained. At Mr. Myers' they got a revolver and \$1.50 in money."

Ottawa and Emporia may have found Forepaugh a disappointment, but the Topeka papers had only praise.



**Ben Lusby, Forepaugh's ticket seller and treasurer, was praised by a Lawrence newspaper in 1877.**

"Forepaugh's grand amusement combination," reported the *Commonwealth*, "exhibited to two immense houses in Topeka yesterday. All of the seats were filled and hundreds were compelled to 'squat' on the ground. The menagerie is the best that has ever appeared in Topeka. It has the rhinoceros, hippopotamus, black tiger, sea lion, and all the other curiosities of the animal kingdom it purports to have. The hippopotamus and baby elephant excited the most curiosity and interest. The performance of the elephants were wonderful, and the ring performances generally were fully up to the average. The street display was very fine. Forepaugh has a grand

show--one of the best on the road."

An interesting paragraph appeared in the *Commonwealth*, September 22. "G. W. Bronson, advance agent of Forepaugh's Great Circus, is in the city trying to effect arrangements for the wintering of that show in Topeka." Nothing more is known of Bronson's effort, except that nothing came of it.

The *Lawrence Daily Tribune* on show day, June 14, reported the show in two paragraphs probably written by Forepaugh's press agent, referring to the largest crowd Lawrence had ever witnessed, but mainly singing the praises of Ben Lusbie, Forepaugh's treasurer who reputedly could sell 6,000 tickets an hour and make the correct change.

From Lawrence the show moved on the Santa Fe to Kansas City, en route to Leavenworth. High water at Kansas City prevented a transfer to the Missouri Pacific, and the show was forced to return to Lawrence and continue to Leavenworth on a branch line of the Kansas Pacific.

Forepaugh falsely advertised in Topeka in an effort to harm the Sells Brothers, but according to the *Blade*, June 11, the shoe was placed on the other foot. "Advance sheets announce that the great showman, P. T. Barnum, will be here soon." Barnum failed to appear.

There was a small show circulating through the small towns of Kansas in 1877 that was of more than usual interest. The complete routing of the show is not available, but dates were played in Kansas during at least two months.

It was The Great Universal Fair and World Wonder Exposition, Uniting Soulier's Parisian Hippodrome, Dieffenbach's Great Exhibition of Living Masters of Zoology, Vetturini's Italian Corso, Monroe's Marvelous Troupe of Wild Bedouins of the Desert, and Maxwells' Novel Combination Troupe of Japs and Indians.

According to the ads, the entourage, which was "At once entrancing, moral and happy in effect," played the following Kansas towns: May 5, Independence; May 9, Sedan; June 1, Lindsborg; June 2, Salina; June 4, Abilene; June 5, Junction City; June 9, Clay Center; June 28, Valley Falls and June 29, Winchester.

The *Chautauqua Journal*, Sedan, May 4, reported. "Their advance guard con-

sisting of five men--advertising agents, contractors, were in town last week posting the bills and arranging for the accommodations of some two hundred and twenty men and horses."

The menagerie was prominently featured in the newspaper advertisements. Always listed were, "The Great Hippopotamus! Behemoth of Holy Writ, on earth there is not his like. Trained Alaska Moose, Alexis, African Crocodiles, Horned Horse of Ethiopia, Tartarian Yak, or Grunting Ox, The Cynocephalies, The Mantees, or Sea Cows."

On show day there was a grand street parade and a free balloon ascension and "Wire walking in the morning. Doors open at 1 and 7 o'clock. Performances commence half an hour later." Adults, 50 cents; children under 10 years, 25 cents.

The parade was headed by "Eppisoff's Musical Brigade, Mounted ala Russian Cavalry." The thrilling balloon ascension was made by the "Aeronauts, Mons. Verne and Richards."

The advertisement in the *Clay County Dispatch*, Clay Center, for the exhibition of June 9, strongly affirmed the ascension: "The management wish to say, in connection with this announcement, that they have learned that a show travelled through this section of the country last season and deceived its patrons by advertising balloon ascensions which never took place; a reprehensible practice which may have a tendency to excite disbelief in the minds of some who would like to patronize us. To all such we would say this exhibition fills the bill in all respects, and performs scrupulously what it advertises. The balloon ascension will certainly take place every day no matter whether it may rain or shine. There can be no failure for want of gas as we carry a portable gas factory and manufacture the necessary gas on the ground daily for the purpose of inflating the balloons. Also for lighting the pavilions which will be brilliantly illuminated with 1,200 gas jets on the night of the exhibition. We also carry with us duplicate balloons in case of accident."

The *Dispatch*, after the show moved on, was able to report that Clay Center, population 786, on a nice pleasant day provided Soulier with good crowds: "The ring performances were up to the

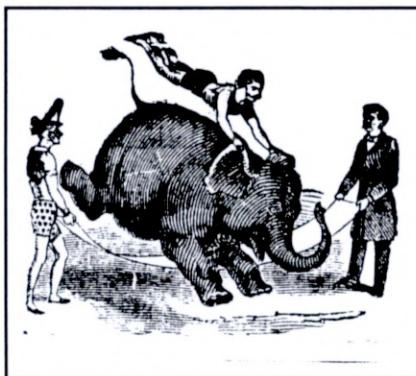
average, with some new features introduced. The balloon ascension was the grandest exhibition of the day, and was really 'worth miles of travel to behold."

By the end of June, Aeronaut Richards had been replaced by Prof. L. D. Atchison. A. F. Wood was in charge of the advance.

In another column the *Dispatch* reported a feature unique to the Wonder-World Exposition:

"THE SCREAMER,  
"A Rara Avis Not Down on the  
"Bills.

"The 'Wonder-World Exposition' which is making the circuit of northern Kansas just now, has a new character among its hangers-on--a 'Screamer.' She



Forepaugh used this fanciful cut of a baby elephant jumping over a banner in his 1877 newspaper ads.

is pretty, bright and fascinating in her way; has a small apartment attached to the side-show and is known as the 'Phrenologist.' Into this little apartment she entices her victims for the purpose of reading to them the hidden mysteries of their character through the developments of their craniums. It costs them nothing to get in, but when once there and the door seemingly closed, she guesses at their pile and makes a demand for all the change she thinks they may carry. Of course the victim hesitates, when she--the screamer--emphatically informs him that he must 'come down' or she will scream and he will not only be disgraced for an attempt to outrage her extremely virtuous person, but a host of her friends stand out-side ready to come at one little scream and beat him into food for the

animals. Occasionally she emphasised her demands by drawing a pair of pretty revolvers from her pocket. So thoroughly is she posted in her art that she not infrequently succeeds in clearing fifty to a hundred and even two hundred dollars a day we are informed, and in getting money from not only the 'unsophisticated' but even those who consider themselves posted. We have heard of none in Clay Center who were taken in by the pretty screamer, but we dare say that more than one who reads this item can testify from experience to its truthfulness. This modern siren makes no secret of her business among those who follow the show, and even at the hotel is called the 'Screamer' and her companions relate the joke with as hearty pleasure as they do the boasted feats of the most daring performers."

## 1878

A terrible choice was offered Topeka in July of 1878--W. W. Cole's Famous New York and New Orleans Circus, Museum, Menagerie and Congress of Living Wonders; or the Great London Show, Sanger's Enlarged British Menagerie, Dockrill's Parisian Circus and the Grotesque Mardi-Gras Carnival. Price could not help in making the decision, for both shows advertised, "Adults, 50 cents, Children, 25." Cole appeared on July 5; Great London on July 9. The only sensible solution was to do what most Topekans did, attend both shows.

Cole's newspaper advertising made its first appearance June 14. He admitted that his show, "Coming on 3 Special Trains," held "SUPERIORITY OVER ANY OTHER SHOW IN AMERICA," and the world was challenged to equal his great show, and on show day the world was offered "THE MOST GORGEOUS STREET PARADE EVER SEEN." In the menagerie were "Baby Dromedaries, Baby Elephants, Baby Lions, Baby Leopards, Baby Camels, Baby Monkeys, Baby Tigers, Baby Sea Lions" and a "DEN OF MONSTER SERPENTS! SOME OF WHICH ARE FIFTY FEET LONG." The *Kansas Farmer* advertised 35 dens of animals, the *Blade* and the *Commonwealth*, only 30.

The most publicized attraction was "The Tallest Man and Woman On Earth, Capt. and Mrs. M. B. Bates." A hand-

**Guelph, Saturday, August 24th.  
Coming on 3 Special Trains!**

FIFTH ANNUAL TOUR OF THE CONTINENT BY RAIL.  
A Congress of Bewilderin Attractions!  
10,000 Separate and Distinct Novelties!

The Earth, the Sea, the Sky, and all represented in a  
**Vast Wilderness of Exhibition Tents.**

ONE TICKET ADMITS TO ALL

**W. W. COLE'S**

Famous New York and New Orleans

Circus, Museum, Menagerie and Congress of Living Wonders.



**W. W. COLE** - - - **SOLE PROPRIETOR.**

This grand and classic entertainment is wholly exempt from the indecencies and coarseness too frequently permitted in most of tent exhibitions. In this Great Show there is nothing ever presented that a gentleman would hesitate to bring his family to witness, or the most exacting take exception to.

**Our Superiority over any other Show in America.**

The Wonders and Beauties of Nature; Ocean Marvels; The Gaucho Horsemanship of the Pampas; Superb Display of Arctic Marvels; Monarchs of the rivers and jungles of India, Africa, and South America. We challenge the world to equal our Great Show.

**W. W. Cole featured Capt. and Mrs. Bates in his 1878 ads in Kansas.**

out in the *Blade*, June 29, described the couple as "the largest man and largest woman in the world. Mr. Bates, the male giant, is eight feet high, lacking one half inch, and his better half, who appears along with him, boasts exactly the same number of feet of womanhood. The couple have appeared before Her Majesty, who was so much impressed by their appearance that she presented his giantship with a magnificent gold watch valued at \$1,000.

"Half a ton represents the joint weight of this remarkable pair."

The show claimed 50 performers, 20 beautiful lady artists, 18 daring children, 20 select musicians and 6 funny clowns.

The *Commonwealth*, June 15, reported, "The boys, big and little, of the city yesterday were fondly gazing on the beautiful scenes presented on the various billboards of the city that have been furnished for their special enjoyment by the advance agents of Cole's circus.

Charles Swalls, agent for Cole, was back in Topeka on June 21.

"The palatial advertising car of the Great London Show came in over the

Kansas Pacific yesterday morning bearing W. W. Durand, the general advance agent, and a large corps of assistants," according to the *Commonwealth*, June 27. "The car is a beauty in every respect and attracted a good deal of attention in North Topeka yesterday."

On the 28th the *Commonwealth* reported, "A. F. Stewart, the champion bill poster of the state, has erected the largest billboard ever seen in Kansas. It is twenty feet high by fifty feet long, and has been billed for Howe's (sic) Great London Circus." The *Blade* gave the location as Second Street and Kansas Avenue.

It was the best of times for Stewart. The *Blade*, June 29, reported that the Cole show had purchased over seven thousand feet of lumber for billboards in

addition to the bills that were first put up. "A. F. Stewart, the city bill poster, with a force of twenty men is now erecting the boards and billing the city for this monster show that will positively be here July 5th."

The *Kansas Farmer*, July 3, noted that, "The versatile and energetic press agent of the 'Great London Show,' Mr. Claude DeHaven, has been in Topeka for two days past completing arrangements for their exhibition the 9th inst."

On show day, the Cole aggregation arrived in North Topeka on the Kansas Pacific about 5 a. m. from Kansas City where it had celebrated the 4th of July with three crowded houses. According to the *Commonwealth*, "About 11 a. m. the grand street procession passed along our principal streets which were lined with curious lookers-on. It was gorgeous to say the least, and everyone remarked, 'What splendid horses and in what good condition, too' in which they were correct, for never has such a large number of well kept horses been seen in Topeka.

"In the afternoon the large canvas was filled full, and last night it was crammed. The performance was excellent; both afternoon and evening

and deserves commendation. The ladies of the company are unusually handsome. Altogether it was fully what it was advertised to be, and those who did not attend missed a rare entertainment."

Circus day was marred by a couple of incidents. A story in the *Blade* related a curious runaway: "As the circus was starting from North Topeka yesterday morning the parade frightened O. Vaughn's pony with which he delivers lime, and either from fright or a desire to 'show off,' the pony climbed on the back part of a skeleton wagon to which a horse belonging to Dr. Huntoon was attached. This, in turn, frightened Huntoon's horse and right there occurred a lively scene. Huntoon's horse finally escaped from the driver and after making a rapid tour over the First Ward

**The Bates probably sold this card while on the Cole show. Printed in black and white it measures about 4" x 7".**

ON EXHIBITION IN MAIN TENT IN  
**W. W. COLE'S N. Y. & N. O. Circus and Menagerie, &c.**

THE TWO TALLEST PEOPLE ON EARTH  
- EACH 7 FEET 6 INCHES HIGH  
COMBINED WEIGHT ONE HALF TON.



THE GIANTS

broke for home, leaving the wagon on the river bridge. The frightened animal was finally stopped opposite the Shawnee Mills without having sustained any serious damage."

The loading of the train drew a large crowd to the Kansas Pacific depot after the performance and led to the second unpleasantness of the day when a sneak thief stole a small amount of change out of the money drawer while the telegraph operator's back was turned.

Cole moved on to Wamego for exhibitions on July 13, which passed without incident, apparently a circus day satisfactory to all.

Cole arrived in Clay Center on July 7, and many of the showmen sought escape from the 98 degree heat. A free show of sorts was provided when Capt. Bates went for a swim in the Republican river. The Clay Center *Dispatch* reported, "Several citizens went down to see the fun, and report that was by far the best part of the show. The Capt. is a number one swimmer, and was not the least bit bashful about pulling off his clothes before the crowd of spectators."

The *Dispatch* in reviewing the show remarked that over 3,500 attended the matinee and the evening performance drew about 800. "The show was in many respects a superior organization. Everything was in good order, from the giants down to the 80-year-old elephant. There were two or three real ugly, scoundrelly, scalawags connected with the show, and Mr. Cole will never own a model establishment until he 'shakes' them."

W. W. Cole in circus history presents a stern, rigid image that encourages one, right or wrong, to attribute to him puritanical standards. One is tempted to think of Chilly Billy as a towering mastodon of ice water virtue.

The *South Kansas Tribune*, Independence, July 17, reporting of show day, July 11, provided more information on the "ugly, scoundrelly, scalawags" discovered in Clay Center, and in so doing provides an insight of W. W. Cole who permitted them to prey upon the patrons of his show: "On Thursday, Councilman W. R. Savage did a praiseworthy act, by saving an old gentleman \$50, of which the fakirs with the circus had robbed him. The old gentleman is past seventy-six, and is not a gambler, but

The Papers all Pronounce it the Best Show Ever in Iowa.  
CLINTON, THURSDAY, AUGUST 22d!

Four Undivided Shows Consolidated for Exhibition, 1878

Make no Mistake—Hove's London is the Only Show without an Equal.

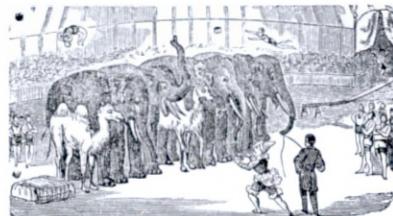
## Creat London Show,

Sanger's Enlarged British Menagerie!

### DOCKRILL'S PARISIAN CIRCUS,

AND THE GROTESQUE MARDI GRAS CARNIVAL.

One stupendous and undivided consolidation of nearly all that is grand, great, and novel in the Amusement, Sportsmen, Curious and Dazzling World.



### ROYAL TALLY-HO COACH!

Purchased from an English Duke, with drivers, hounds and guards, costumes included, at a cost of \$10,000.00. A truly equine masterpiece. A coach which has won for him the appellation of Champion of Royal pleasure life in the modern country, and is in strong contrast with our familiar means of stage coach travel.

#### MAD. ELISE DOCKRILL,

The Greatest Living Equestrienne and Only Female Four-Horse Rider.

#### JAMES ROBINSON,

Whose Barbs and graceful bare-back riding has won for him the appellation of Champion of all vertebrae.

#### MILE. PAULINE LEE,

Whose Juggling Specialties have obtained the applause of nearly every country on the globe.

#### WILLIAM GORMAN,

Hurrier or Harder Rider of World-wide Celebrity.

MAN-SIZED HOPING MONKEY, in somersaults and musical acrobatics. Group of five Royal Tigris Tiges, the most graceful and alert animals ever brought from the jungle.

THE SWIMMING QUEEN, 6 minutes submerged under water. BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, with Hair Five Feet Long and of silken texture.

5 ELEPHANTS IN PYRAMID!

#### 7 Massive Chariots!

Of splendid design and artistic finish. DOCKRILL AND HIS UNQUEALLED Stud of Turkoo-Servian Horses, At stupendous cost.

#### LAIR OF TEN GRAVE-ROBBING HYENAS!

Performed in open den in the street pageant by the native MONTANA.

#### Smallest Boat that ever Crossed an Ocean!

Accompanied by Capt. Orphe and wife.

#### THE HAIRY GIRL!

Completely covered head to foot with long, dark, shaggy hair.

Leap and Double Somersault of 38 ft.

Over five elephants and five horses, by MR. FRANK GARDNER.

### The Great London Show opposed Cole in Kansas in 1878. Circus World Museum collection.

he gathered with the throng on the show ground, and was inveigled into a side show and then into 'guessing' on a game. He was assured that he had won \$200, and would most assuredly get that if he put up half that amount. He didn't have the \$100, but upon the persuasion of a 'friend' put up \$50. Of course he lost, and coming up town, was almost broken hearted, when he related his gambling experience in Mr. Savage's store. It so enraged Mr. S that he went at once to the grounds, and by the power that in him lies, forced the fakir to give up the fifty dollars. He walked back proudly, and delivered the money to his old friend, and was the recipient from him and all who knew of the transaction, of sincere thanks.

"During the afternoon another old gentleman, from near Coffeyville, was invited into the same tent and swindled.

He came before County Attorney Hinkle, who filed complaint, and Sheriff Brock armed with his majesty of the law, went down and caused the gambler to give up his ill gotten gains, and pay the costs.

"How many more were robbed, we know not, but we hope the lesson will not be forgotten by the young."

The chances of beating a fakir at his own game are exceedingly slim, but one wonders that if the old gentleman had won, would they have complained?

In another column the *Tribune* commented, "Circus day was the 'big' day of the year. They all come, old, young, rich, poor, and the crowd was the biggest of the season, and to the credit of our town be it said there was no disturbance of the peace, and no arrests, except for gaming."

The *Garnett Weekly Journal* claimed that Cole drew 5,000 for the exhibitions on July 12.

July 13, the Cole show played Ottawa. The *Republican*, July 18, was not impressed: "After the manner of circuses nowadays Cole's promised more than it exhibited. But we suppose everybody understands that this will be the case, and we therefore have no complaint to file. Many features of the circus in question were excellent, a few superior, and number below the ordinary--as a whole we were not satisfied with the show. The officials are gentlemanly and prompt in business matters, but the exhibition might be a good deal better than it is, and then not be equal to the best."

Coming from Lawrence the Great London arrived in North Topeka on the Kansas Pacific at 3:30 a. m., moving in one section powered by two locomotives.

The *Commonwealth* described the parade: "About half-past ten it appeared, headed by beautifully caparisoned guards, behind which was the London Tally Ho Coach, bearing a superb cornet band. A bewildering display of richly attired ladies and gentlemen, horses, etc., followed. The massive golden chariots were truly gorgeous, surrounded by ladies whose beauty attracted universal attention. Farther on in the procession appeared another band, the famous five performing elephants, camels, a countless array of Mardi-Gras charac-

ters--in all a perfect panoply of splendor."

Elephants produced a violent reaction from local unsophisticated, unworldly, yokel horses and the magnificent parade from the Great London produced a runaway of impressive magnitude. The *Commonwealth* carried the story: "Yesterday as the procession of Howes' Great London Circus was turning on to Sixth Street from Jackson, a team of horses attached to a wagon loaded with stone, becoming scared of the elephants, started to run, striking a telephone pole, thereby breaking the wagon in two. The horses with the front wheels hanging to them, started up Sixth Street and when at the corner of Van Buren collided with a horse and buggy belonging to Mr. John Leidigh, turning over the buggy and throwing the horse on its back, hereby spilling out Mr. Leidigh. The three horses then started up Sixth Street. Mr. Leidigh's horse ran across the river and into the lumber yard before it was caught. The buggy was considerably smashed, but otherwise no damage was done."

The Great London presented a powerful performance. Four of the greatest riders of the times appeared on the bill: Mlle Elsie Dockrill, James Robinson, Mlle Pauline Lee and William Gorman. Elsie Dockrill was advertised as "the only woman who rides four horses at a time." Lee worked an "elegant and graceful principal act" and did a turn as a juggler. Gorman was labeled "the Wizard Horseman and Hurricane Hurdle and Jockey Rider." The top of the bill was held by James Robinson, undisputed champion bareback rider of the world and such a favorite of audiences that the cheering began the moment he entered the tent on his way to the ring.

Other attractions were: Alfred Still working five Royal Bengal tigers; Montano, appearing with eight grave-robbing hyenas; the Cretan Beauty, a woman with hair five feet long; teams of Lapland deer and zebras in harness; Esau "the hairy girl" with body covered by long silky hair; Captain Crapo and his wife who crossed the Atlantic in



The Great London's parade included this elephant tableau which was later used on the Barnum show in the 1880s. Circus World Museum collection.

1877 in a small boat; the Fish Woman and Water Sprite, the Swimming Queen, who remained under water for six minutes.

One of the finest performers was Frank Gardner who turned a double somersault over a camel and five elephants while leaping 38 feet. The *Commonwealth* declared, "The performance in the ring, both afternoon and evening, was even better than advertised. Mr. Frank Gardner's fearful leap, being alone worth the price of admission."

The *Commonwealth* agreed with the advertising that Elsie Dockrill was, indeed, the "Empress of the Arena." The Miranda sisters were cited for their daring on the trapeze and their great beauty.

The *Blade* commented on the excellence of the five elephants--Chieftan, Emperor, Sultan, Mandrie and Victoria. The *Blade* also carried the following on the day after the exhibition: "A young lady who was observing the animals in Howe's menagerie yesterday, was res-

cued by her companion from an elephant that had seized her by the--as it were Grecian--bend, and twisted off nearly all of her clothing. It was evidently trying to get her fine duds in its trunk. She *barely* escaped."

In addition to Topeka, July 9, the Great London exhibited in the following Kansas towns: July 8, Lawrence; July 10, Abilene; July 11, Salina; July 12, Junction City; July 13, Emporia; July 15, Parsons and July 16, Ft. Scott.

The *Salina County Journal* Salina, reported, July 18, that, "Circus day our streets were crowded with men, women and children who had come to town to see the sights. About 10 o'clock one of the finest street parades which ever took place in Salina, came up Eighth Street to Iron Avenue, thence to Seventh Street, thence to

Walnut, thence to Santa Fe and down Santa Fe. In the afternoon the immense tent was filled with people and a first class circus performance was given. We believe there was more satisfaction given by this company than any heretofore visiting our city. But for the illness of Mme. Dockrill, everything advertised would have been given. The evening performance drew a large crowd also."

The most impressive feature of the Junction City stand, on July 12, was the billboard ordered by W. W. Durand, agent in charge of the advance. The *Union* reported on June 29 that, "A mammoth bulletin board for the advertising bills of the London circus has been erected on the northeast corner of the park, by William Lawrence. The board is 200 feet long on Washington Street and 100 feet on Sixth."

The show drew thousands to town for a gala day. "The street parade was perfectly gorgeous, the menagerie was good and the ring performance was decidedly the best ever given in Junction City. The London is truly an immense show, and in all respects, it is the best that travels."

Except for Mrs. A. C. Stickney, who was prostrated by the heat on circus day, and, according to the *Union*, July

20, "has been ill ever since," show day was a delight to all.

The Emporia *News*, July 19, published a description of the parade which, though it has the aroma of a press handout, is perhaps as complete a listing as ever existed:

#### "THE LONDON CIRCUS

"This great show had fine weather here Saturday, and made a splendid street pageant in the forenoon, and held forth to large crowds in the afternoon and evening, performing what advertisements promised, and giving complete satisfaction. The street procession was a long one, in the following order:

"Tally Ho coach, a very complete vehicle drawn by six horses, and carrying a fine brass band in scarlet uniform.

"Eight ladies and gentlemen, on horseback two by two, in fine costumes, and white feathers in hats.

"Magnificent globe chariot, drawn by eight gray horses, lady in costume seated upon globe, which was guarded at each corner of the chariot by men in mail and by four large brass lions and female statues.

"Open den of six large hyenas, keeper within, and drawn by four horses.

"Menagerie wagon drawn by four horses.

"Small royal chariot, drawn by six ponies and two horses, and two noble lords inside.

"Mardi Gras carnival, consisting of six menagerie wagons with men in grotesque disguise on top.

"War chariot, drawn by two ponies, and driven by a fat clown.

"Mardi Gras wagon.

"Capt. Crapo's sail boat, in which he and his wife crossed the Atlantic, with the captain on deck and his wife's head appearing above the miniature cabin in which she sat. Both were quiet, modest looking people, the Captain looking like a substantial farmer, and his wife looking like a modest and intelligent lady, as she undoubtedly is.

"Four Mardi Gras wagons.

"Open chariot drawn by three small mules and a zebra, and occupied by two young Dukes, in costume.

"Mardi Gras wagon.

"Magnificent mirror chariot,

four horses, carrying band in blue uniform.

"Two Mardi Gras wagons.

"Camel.

"Dragon chariot, drawn by two handsome ponies, two ourang outangs [sic] on the dragon, and old Neptune with his trident enthroned on the reptile's tail.

"Superb spectacular golden chariot, adorned on the sides with handsome pictures of female heads, and drawn by eight white horses, brass elephant in center ridden by beautiful damsel, guarded by men in mail.

"Five elephants in single file.

"Menagerie wagon.

"As this procession went up the street, the hearts of lads and lasses beat, and the show was declared to be a treat, bright and fresh and gay and neat, by the oldest coons who go to the show, the children the menagerie, oh.

"It was a very fine procession, and by all accounts the animal show was quite satisfactory and the circus the best for years. The London show is the best

**Another feature of the Great London parade was this globe wagon which inspired the Five Graces. This wagon was a feature of the Barnum show parade in the 1880s. Circus World Museum collection.**



that is traveling in the west, we think."

The last show of the season for Topeka came on September 5, when Dan Rice's Consolidated and Reconstructed Circus and Trained Animal Exhibition came to town, overland after dates in Wamego on September 3, and St. Marys, on September 4.

Dan was down on his luck, but he was making a mighty effort to regain his place with the public. The Wamego *Tribune*, September 7, reviewed the show in one paragraph: "Dan Rice's Circus held forth afternoon and night Tuesday. As only a couple of days notice had been given the circus was not well attended. It was genuine Dan Rice, though, and those who did attend got their money's worth of amusement. They struck tents at St. Marys, Wednesday."

The advertisement carried in the Wamego *Tribune*, August 31, tells more about the show than can be found in the news columns.

Top billing went to his horses: "The following is a list of some of these sa-gacious and beautiful horses:

"Blind Talking Horse Excelsior,

"Grand Tower,

"Luta and Centralia,

"Comic Mules,

"Pete and Barney

"Besides a Stud of Ring Horses of rare style and beauty."

Humans included in the ad were "My Troupe of Handsome Young Men."

Sam H. McFinn, who would someday have his own show, was described as "The finest Trick Clown and Vocalist in the country."

Others were Jacob Showles, German Equestrian; Charles Bell, Wild Indian Rider; Ed Childs, first class performer; George Jenner, "Gymnast with a form of Young Apollo Belvedere;" Master Willie Wells, "the Serpent Boy; a most peculiar freak of Nature, evi-denced by his extraordinary physical contortions," Master Willie Showles, "The Boss Boy Rider of the World."

Among those listed prominently were the Larbey Brothers, World Champion Acrobats; young Bil-ly Wheeler, Son of Momus;



**Elsie Dockrill was a featured rider on Great London in 1878. She was one of the finest female riders ever.**

lady equestriennes Miss Nanna Howland, Miss Mary Love, Miss Minnie Brown; and Frederick Miltmore and Joe Berry, First-Class Gymnasts.

"25--FIRST CLASS PERFORMERS--25" In his Topeka advertising Rice added the statement, "Special attention has been paid to the selection of the Band, whose leader is the coming man in the musical world--A. S. TITUS, the best Cornet player and Band Leader in the Circus business. Each member of the Band is A No. 1, and capable of executing a solo on the instrument they play.

"Adults, 50 cents; Children under 10 Years, Half Price."

Dan drew small audiences in Topeka, principally due to the short notice (four days) given by his advertising, but also due to a belief explained in the *Blade*, September 6: "The original, identical, bonifide Dan Rice. The same old Dan Rice that exhibited to such large crowds twenty years ago, was in our city yesterday. The general impression had got out among the circus-going Topekans that Dan was dead, and when he was billed for this place, the Knowing (?) ones pronounced it as humbug of the first class, which did much to keep back a large turn-out to his entertainment, but every one who did attend, were well pleased, for Dan himself appeared in the ring as a clown and made his audience

laugh as only Rice can make an audience laugh."

The *Blade* further stated that "Dan Rice is sixty one years old and as gay as a boy."

"Old Dan Rice looks as natural as one could expect," reported the *Commonwealth*. "He don't grow old, seemingly, and his flow of spirits (not ardent) is unceasing. Last night he made his audience laugh, as he has made crowded tents full of people, laugh for years.

"His company is a good one, most of them young men, whom Dan is making into star actors. The gymnastic act was especially good, and the riding was unexceptional (sic). A new thing for circus rings was artistic balancing on a ladder.

"Everything was done well, and though the number in attendance was small, the appreciation was manifest. Dan Rice goes today to Lawrence, and will show there two days, we believe."

"They tarried late around Tefft last night," according to the *Blade*. "Dan Rice made several speeches."

For the subject of Dan's speeches we must leap ahead to January of 1880.

Dan was a notorious drinker but from time to time he would get a touch of religion, swear off the demon rum, climb up on the wagon and deliver temperance lectures--for a fee. A lecture was scheduled for Topeka in 1880.

"From the Ring to the Rostrum," announced an ad in the *Commonwealth*. A Lecture by the World-Famous Follower of Momus, Dan Rice, on Thursday Eve., January 8th [1880] at the Opera House. Subject: 'Religious Rights and Education.' Admission 35 and 50 cents, according to location. Seats for sale at Postoffice News stand."

On the 9th of January the *Commonwealth* reported, "Dan Rice. He Didn't Come. Dan Rice failed to put in an appearance yesterday, and therefore those who wished to hear him were disappointed. Perhaps Dan was afraid he could not secure proper hotel accommodations. When he was here with his circus two years ago last summer, his baggage was attached by the proprietors of the Tefft House, for the amount of the bill. Col. J. R. Boyd loaned him the necessary amount, and the attachment was removed. Dan could not get over



**James Robinson, shown here with his family, was also a principal rider on was with Great London in 1878.**

the indignity, however, and became so excited, while talking about the matter, that he cried like a baby. At times his mood changed, and he indulged in curses loud and deep. He denounced the proprietors who had his baggage and some one else who had a pair of horses, we don't remember who it was. The Tefft House should fall in two years. Two years from that night it must fall to the ground, for Dan Rice had said it. It was a long time until he was induced to get into the wagon and be driven away. This occurred at night, and the exhibition was in front of the hotel, on a sidewalk."

The Tefft House stood until 1881 when Allen Sells had it thoroughly remodeled and called it the Windsor.

"The Newest, Best and Biggest Railway Show on Earth!!!

"Coming by Many Special Trains!  
"will exhibit at

"Humbolt,  
"Wednesday, July 10th, 1878."

The monster show was Campbell's Great New York and Philadelphia Zoological & Equestrian Institute.

The day before Humbolt, the show played Burlington on July 9. The day after Humbolt on July 11, the show played Osage Mission. The author is unaware of any other Kansas dates. Neither the Burlington nor the Humbolt papers bothered to review or even com-

ment on the show following its exhibitions. All that we know of Campbell's is contained in single ads in the *Burlington Independent* and the *Humbolt Union*, and in one press handout carried in the *Union*, July 6. Every circus of the day was the biggest and the best, but this one was "The Largest Railroad Circus traveling, and more than double the size of any traveling by wheels."

The performance, according to the handout, featured Victorelli and Cardello on the horizontal bars; Miss Hallett in the flying rings; Leopold and Gaston, trapeze; Linda Jeal, hurdle rider and revolving ball; tumbling, perch and barrel acts by the company; band of Prof. Luther. Miss Rosa Lee was the star of the show.

"Blood is a very peculiar sort of juice," to borrow from Goethe, and Rosa Lee is a fine illustration of it. She was born to the arena, and is one of the finest representatives to the great law of Avatism in existence. Her ancestors have been for generations in the ring before her, and she takes to juggling, horseback riding, leaping and acrobatic feats as naturally as a duck to water. She is only fifteen, but there is no other female like her in capacity on a bare-back steed. While her horse is in full gallop she tosses large and small balls and knives in the air, spins plates and goes through a variety of other feats that would evoke praise from a Hindoo Fakir."

On the ground Rosa could do all that the best acrobats could do and in addition "she is a very hard student and a very strict Catholic. Rosa Lee is a wonderful girl."

After the Osage Mission exhibition the show scheduled the following dates: July 12, Nevada, Missouri; July 13, Sedalia; July 15, Independence; July 16, Pleasant Hill; July 17, Holden; July 18, Warrensburg; July 19, Brownsville and July 20, Lexington (all Missouri).

Another show circulating through Kansas in 1878 was Burr Robbins' Great American and German Allied Shows, now advertised as a "Beautiful, Portly and Colossal Amusement Temple," the "Pride and Boast of the Entire Republic." Washington was billed for September 9. On August 30 the *Washington Republican* reported, "The little boys are having a nice time now view-



**John O'Brien's Campbell Circus appeared in Kansas in 1878.**

ing the circus pictures posted on the West side of the square. Even some little shavers with gray hair and long whiskers seem to enjoy the sight."

The "Parade and Tournament" was described not only as "Artistic and Elegant," but also as "Refulgent." The parade wagons were decorated with "Biblical Illustrations and characteristic Scriptural events," as well as mythological and classical themes.

The most recent circus to visit a town was often described as "the best circus that has ever exhibited in the west." The *Republican* thought Robbins' show to be the best, and, it commented, "In many features it is entirely original, and every performer is a star."

In a handout in the *Clay County Dispatch* touting the exhibition in Clay Center for Monday, September 16, stated, "The papers published in towns where this show has exhibited, are liberal in its praise. They announce the animal collection the largest ever shown under canvas; and they say of the arena performance: 'They are chaste and pure in character, and therefore unexcelled.'

"It will pay every man, woman and child within a radius of forty miles, to see the show and give the day to instruction and amusement."

The *Dispatch* also thought the Rob-

bins show "the best on the road. It is spoken of on all hands as the best circus performance ever in this part of the country."

In Minneapolis, September 19, the parade again featured Mlle Leon in a den of lions and Herr Brooks in the midst of a den of "savage Hyenas."

Leading the parade was the "Golden Car of Europe containing the world famed band of 20 musicians."

After the show had come and gone, the *Minneapolis Independent* reported: "Mr. Robbins' Menagerie and Circus brought the largest crowd to town that we have ever seen. The farmers came to town with their families in such numbers that every nook and corner of our city was crowded with vehicles. The parade of the show through town was excellent, and evinced the fact that everyone connected with the exhibition was genuine and No. 1. An immense crowd attended the first performance in the afternoon. Unfortunately the rain came down heavily in the evening which limited the attendance and interfered with the performance. Mr. Burr Robbins has earned himself a good reputation here, and if he ever comes this way again he may safely calculate on liberal patronage and crowded houses."

Burr Robbins played Beloit on Saturday, September 21, without eliciting any comment from the *Gazette*.

The *Osborne County Farmer*, of August 30, 1878, proclaimed to the citizens of Osborne the approach of a momentous occasion: "The great 'Hippotheatron' is coming and will exhibit in Osborne on the 4th of September and at Bull's City on the following day. This is the first genuine circus that has honored Osborne county with its presence, and no doubt will be well patronized."

The ad in the *Farmer* for the Mammoth Hippotheatron listed a "Mastodon Galaxy of Gymnasts, Vaulters, Vocalists, Acrobats, Hat Spinners, Contortionists, Pantomimists, Tumblers, Comedians, Jugglers, Dancers, and the Trained Arabian Painted Steeds."

On show day at one o'clock, it was announced, "Mrs. Belle Laiscell will make her Trip for Life upon the Cordia Nolanta from the ground to the top of the pavilion."

Inside the tent Mrs. Laiscell was a busy woman, appearing as "The Lady

THE MOST PERFECT AND COMPLETE.

## La Crosse, Friday, June 28 Burr Robbins'

Great American and Royal German



## ALLIED SHOWS

Consisting of a Superb Circus, Monster Menagerie, Museum and Aviary, Combined with the Great Free Allegorical Spectacular Tournament.  
A vast Conjunction of Amusements under a Field of Tents. A Regiment of People, An Army of  
Horses and Animals, Birds and Reptiles, An Endless Array of Golden  
Tableaux Cars, Vans, Cages and Pictures.

### THE DOUBLE MENAGERIE.

Over of Wild Beasts! 1,600 Rare Wild Animals. A myriad of animate and inanimate wonders now  
where else exhibited, and peculiar only to this show.



Only Den of Living, Performing, Flesh-Eating Hyenas, Open in the Streets,  
Performing Elephants, Lions and Tigers. Living Sea  
Monsters and Other Curiosities.

TWO ALLIED MENAGERIES COMBINED IN ONE.  
In a Separate Mammoth Tent, and without Extra Charge will be Exhibited.

Burr Robbins came to Kansas in 1878. This newspaper ad is from a LaCrosse, Wisconsin date in June. Circus World Museum collection.

with the Iron Jaw," a "Female Sampson." She was also "The Dashing Lady Trapezist" who made a "great leap for life." When not appearing as a soloist, she worked as a member of the "Wonderful Laiscell Family, The Challenge Athletes and Acrobats, in their great act entitled Los Heroes de la Alhormbra."

There was El Nino, "The Little Arab Wonder. The wonderful gyrations, contortions, and dislocations are a study for the scientific world." Other performers were Bessie Dunham, "The Charming Swiss Nightingale;" Gilmore and Gibson, "The Comical and Eccentric Dancers and Comedians;" Master Leon, "The Daring Child Trapezist and Equilibrist;" and the Norman Bros., "The Astonishing Egyptian Jugglers." The most remarkable performer was the Hindoo snake charmer, Hasa Chitish Bedid Ash-

bia who "handles the snakes as if they were harmless, takes snakes from the swamp that are deadly, and they follow him." To the detriment of his social life?

On September 6, the *Farmer* ran the following review: "The great Hippotheatron has been here. It came, we saw, and it conquered a good share of the loose change in the neighborhood. It was the best hippotheatron we ever saw, and we believe it is the first one that has visited this continent in this century. Besides embracing all the features which go to make up a first class circus, including a tent, brass band and an advance agent, there was a large band of boys peddling peanuts, confectionery and colored lemonade, a pony trained to eat oats out of a tin platter and another that could be made to lie down. The tumblers were the most expert, being so well adapted, that many interesting feats were performed involuntarily. Altogether it was the best as well as the first circus that has visited our town, and was patronized by a large number of people."

The Mammoth Hippotheatron was mentioned by the Emporia *News* only in an advertisement announcing the exhibition on October 1, of the "Only Novelty Circus in the United States!"

The ad claimed "25 Star Artists! 25; 10 Transcendent Orbits of Attractions never before found under one tent; All the Amusements in the Profession! No one line of amusements. Circus! Minstrels! Pantomimist! Comedians! Trained Horses! Opera! Most Fashionable Entertainment of the Season! No Old, Worn Thread-bare Performances." The performers were unnamed.

The *News* made no comment on the show, not knowing, perhaps, what to call the Mammoth Hippotheatron.

There are no newspapers on file for White Cloud, Kansas, in 1878, but a column headed "White Cloud Chow-Chow," appeared in the *Weekly Kansas Chief*, of September 5 published in Troy, 18 miles away, is the source for the following: "White Cloud Chow-Chow. Hamilton & Sargent's New York Circus is billed for a show here, on next Saturday, September 7th. They claim to make a specialty of showing everything they advertise, and as it is

The Largest and Best of All Shows,  
At DODGEVILLE, Thursday, May 30th

## BURR ROBBINS' GREAT AMERICAN & GERMAN Allied Shows!

TRIPLE CIRCUS, DOUBLE MENAGERIE,  
MUSEUM AND AVIARY.

Entire Shows Combined!

3

One Ticket Admits to all the Shows!

A Vast City of Canvas!

A Moving World of Wonders and Strange Curiosities. Myriads ofAnimate and Inanimate Wonders, Nowhere Else Exhibited and Peculiar to THIS SHOW ONLY.

A REGIMENT OF PEOPLE!  
An Endless Array of  
Horses, Animals,  
Beasts, Birds and Reptiles  
Chariots, Tableaux Cars,  
Vans and Cages!

THE GREAT

GERMAN AND AMERICAN CIRCUS.

100 MALE AND FEMALE PERFORMERS! FIFTY TRAINED ANIMALS!

10,000 CHALLNGER THAT WE HAVE THE BEST LADY RIDERS IN AMERICA!!

Burr Robbins advertised "3  
Entire Shows Combined" in his  
1878 newspaper ads.

unencumbered with a menagerie, it will probably be a first-class affair."

The next Thursday, September 12, the *Chief* reported under the caption of White Cloud Chow-Chow, that, "Hamilton & Sargent's New York Circus, which exhibited here last Saturday, was largely attended, and was perhaps the best that ever visited this place. The performers were numerous, and their tumbling, leaping, equestrianism, horizontal bar and trapeze performances, could hardly be excelled. One special feature of the circus was the noted absence of side shows and gambling institutions, which generally form a part of these large shows."

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Topeka.

## PHOTOS

Four 8 x 10 black and white photos of the Cole Bros. Circus train wreck July 27, 1945. Brainard, Minnesota. \$12.00 Postpaid.

Bill Watson  
3522 R. Willow Ave.  
Castle Shannon, PA



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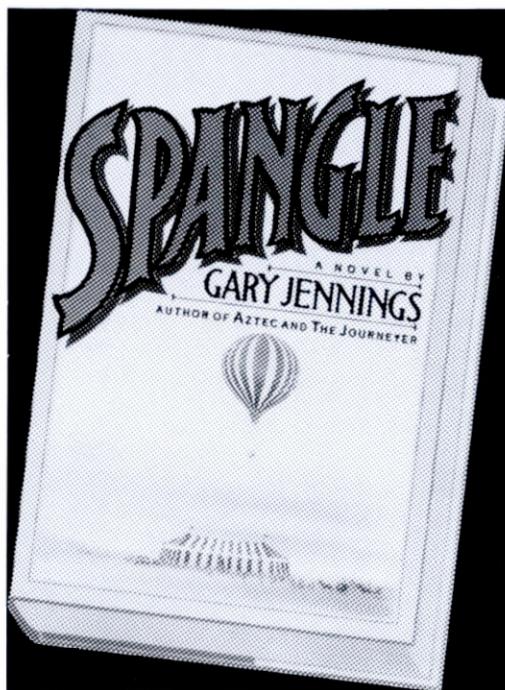
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*“Everywhere it went, it took with it the familiar sounds of canvas flapping, of ropes and poles creaking, rigs and harnesses jingling, heavy wheels rolling, animals whuffling or snorting or rumbling; the familiar odors of those animals and their feed bins, aromas of hay and tan-bark, of greasepaint and the sweat of hard work, the sharp smells of burned gunpowder, hot lamps and the balloon generator’s chemicals; the familiar sights of garish banners billowing, and the tents brilliant in daylight or glowing after dark, and the pista full of action and color, or afterward, empty and asleep in dreams and memories. And always, everywhere, those least and tiniest things in the circus, but the things that said unmistakably ‘circus’—flashing their bright glints to pick out this or that face in the crowd, and dappling with their reflections the faces of their own wearers—the spangles, the spangles...”*



No writer has ever lived inside the circus and captured it so vividly. Here are all of the sights, all the sounds and smells, the triumphs and tragedies, the daredevil artistes and bawdy clowns, the wild beasts and untamable women that made a 19th-century tent show such a marvelous and magical place.

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# Short Sketches of Former Shows

## REO BROS. CIRCUS 1936 & 1944

## DIX BROS. CIRCUS 1945

By Joseph T. Bradbury

### Foreword

"Short Sketches of Former Shows" was the title of a feature we authored that was published in the *Bandwagon* from 1966 through 1967. A total of five installments spotlighted small, little known shows.

The feature is being revived using a slightly different format. Shows like *Lewis Bros.*, a medium sized show, which was done in the past, will not be covered. Instead, all of the subject shows will either be very small or on the road for a short time. In a few cases large circuses will be covered if they were short lived. Very little is known about some of these shows and for many few photographs exist. It is planned that "Short Sketches" will appear regularly.

The initial subject is *Reo Bros. Circus* which first appeared in 1936. About fifteen years ago Kenneth Wheeler, business manager of *Reo Bros.*, sent me a set of photos of the 1936 show. The set of *Reo Bros.* photos are rare. The Circus World Museum has a single *Reo* photo, which is printed here, and the massive Pfening Archives has none.

The 1936 version of *Reo Bros.* as well as the later 1944 show with the same title and the 1945 *Dix Bros. Circus* were all owned by Joseph Dix Conway, who operated out of the greater Philadelphia area.

The first thing a new show owner does is have a letterhead printed. The new letterhead read *Reo Bros. Colossal 3 Ring Circus*. It carried a line in small print reading "Cascabel Amusement Company, Inc., Owner." No address was given, only "En Route." It was printed in red and black.

First notice in the trade publications about *Reo Bros.* came in the March 21, 1936 *Billboard* in a short article headed: "Reo Bros. Show Being Organized." The piece advised that the show was being



**Reo Bros. Circus on the lot in Wayne, Pennsylvania, May 18, 1936.** At right is the single pole sideshow with bannerline and at left is the big top. Kenneth Wheeler photo in the Bradbury collection.

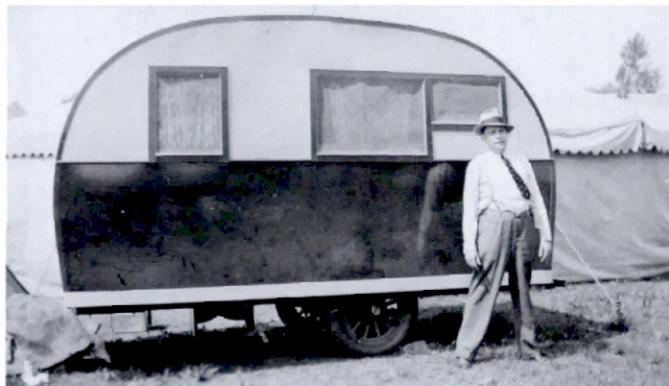
framed at Upper Darby, Pennsylvania and was getting ready to open approximately May 1. Building of truck bodies and seats was completed last week and trucks were being lettered by Cy Price. A new big top had arrived from Baker-Lockwood and poles received from Kenneth Van. The show was scheduled to move on 10 trucks.

Additional information in the initial report said that Clyde E. Mallory would be general agent; Steve Cash, special agent and Mike Payne would

have charge of the advance brigade using a crew of five men. A new line of paper would be used. The person identified as furnishing the information was Kenneth Wheeler, who was in charge of the secretarial duties.

A final item noted that Walter Reo had just arrived from a trip through

**Joseph Dix Conway, owner of Reo Bros. Circus, standing by his living trailer in 1936.** Wheeler photo in the Bradbury collection.



West Virginia and Ohio, and reported favorable industrial conditions. Walter Reo was never identified as to his position with the show. Perhaps this was a front man for the show, or an alias for the owner. The reason for thinking this is that during the time the 1945 Dix Bros. Circus a "Joe Reo" and Joe Conway seemed to be one and the same. In any event the 1936 Walter Reo must have held a senior management position.

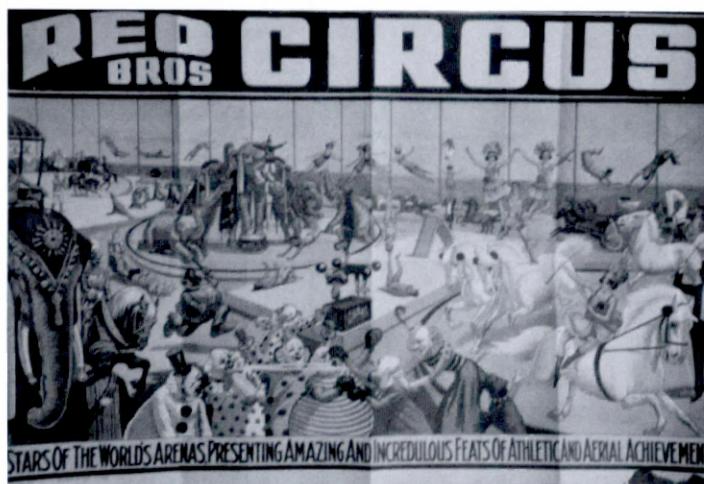
A week later Jethro Almond, who would also have his own motorized circus on the road in 1936, told the *Billboard* that a 24 foot semi-trailer for Reo Bros. Circus had been completed in Albemarle, North Carolina. This city was Almond's headquarters. Whether Almond's shop was responsible for the construction of the new truck or if the work was done elsewhere was not clarified.

A month later the *Billboard* in an April 18 story said that Reo Bros. was being organized in Upper Darby and would open May 1. New light plants had been constructed under the supervision of Pop Hornung and a 24 foot trailer had been received from Albemarle, North Carolina. The report advised that the show would move on its own fleet of trucks.

Additional notes said that Clyde E. Mallory, general agent, had arranged for the first few stands. Bob Russell would have charge of the big top and Anthony Tedesco would have the frozen custard concession. Other privileges had been leased by Frank Keane, Scotty Jacobs and Don Harwood.

Conway placed an order with the Donaldson Lithograph Co. for a line of paper. No special paper was designed, but the stock lithographs imprinted with the Reo title were first class.

The first news of the Reo Bros. performance came in the same article which said that acts already engaged were the Harry Cress Troupe, the Guthrie Duo, Alper's dogs and ponies and the Darling Sisters. The account also reported that Adele Nelson's 3 elephants would be with the show. The reference to the Nelson elephants must have been in error



**The Reo show used some fine stock paper from the Donaldson Litho Co. This is a fine example. Pfening Archives.**

as no elephants appear in the Ken Wheeler photos and when Gorman Bros. Circus opened May 15 at Hackensack, New Jersey the Nelson elephants were in that show's program. However, it is possible that the bulls might have been with the Reo show if only for a very short period.

Shortly before opening day it was announced that the Lloyds (Lloyd Peter-

**This balancing act in the back yard of the Reo show in 1936 is probably the Guthrie Duo. Wheeler photo in the Bradbury collection.**



son) had contracted their side show with Reo Bros. for the 1936 season. Likewise the word was passed that Walter Burke would be bandleader and Herbert A. Douglas front door superintendent.

Conway had another very elaborate four page letter-head printed. On the front page was a design of a clown holding a hoop with the wording within the circle reading "Reo Bros. Circus America's Finest Popular-Priced Motorized Show."

Also printed on the front sheet was "Cascabel Amusement Co., Inc. Sole Owner." There was no address listed. On the two inside pages was a photo covering both sheets depicting a large motorized circus set up on the lot and forming on the street at the right of the photo was the show's parade consisting of some 20-25 motorized units. It would appear that this Reo Bros. Circus was truly among the leaders of truck circuses. But alas the photo was not of Reo Bros., but a Kelty photo of the Sam B. Dill Circus in 1933.

The show opened May 1 in Upper Darby but the *Billboard* carried no report as was customary for most shows, therefore the performance was not listed then or later. Over the next few weeks, however, various acts were mentioned and from these and a number of performers identified in the Ken Wheeler photos we have been able to come up with perhaps most of the 1936 Reo actors.

Len Kish was producing clown and featured his wonder dog, Mitzi. Another clown was Charles Robinson whose speciality was comedy dancing. George Clegg performed in clown makeup and his wife, Edith, was an aerialist. Another aerialist was Calvin Whytes (Huntington). The Bohn Trio, a head and hand balancing act, joined shortly after the opening. Fred Guthrie was another performer, but nothing is known about the act. After Reo closed the *Billboard* reported that he was working at the Cat and Fiddle night club in Cincinnati.

Reo Bros. was only one of some nine new small to medium size motorized circuses going out in 1936. Others on the

**Reo Bros.**  
Colossal 3 Ring Circus

CARCAREL AMUSEMENT COMPANY, INC. OWNERS

en Route



PHILADELPHIA OFFICE  
Room 407  
1011 Chestnut Street

**Dix Brothers Circus**

Community Circus Association, Inc. Owner

Permanent Address  
Room 807  
1011 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia 7, Pa.



At top is the original 1936 Reo letterhead, printed in red and black. In the center is the front sheet of the four page paper used in 1936. The 1945 Dix paper at bottom is printed in black. Pfening Archives.

list included Bockus & Kilonis (covered in prior Short Sketches), Bud Hawkins, Eddie Kuhn, Bonham Bros., Maynard Bros., Sam Jones, Joe B. Webb (also previously covered) and Martin Bros. Several of these were unable to make a full season.

From photos it is evident that the big top did not have new white canvas and appears to have been about a 65 or 70 foot round with two middles, probably 30s. The top had a marquee of new canvas with the wording "Main Entrance." The side show top was a single center pole round, about fifty foot in diameter, with a bannerline of seven banners. There was a small cookhouse tent and several little tents which may have served as dressing rooms.

A number of trucks are

most large and small circuses in the 1930s.

Little is known of the route other than a few dates, all in eastern Pennsylvania, not far from Philadelphia. The show played Media on May 13, West Chester the 16th and Wayne on the 18th. The later two stands both produced capacity business according to a report Ken Wheeler sent to the *Billboard*. The June 6, 1936 issue said that Herbert A. Douglas, front door superin-

**Lot view of the 1936 Reo Bros. Circus. The big top and marquee are shown. Wheeler photo in the Bradbury collection.**

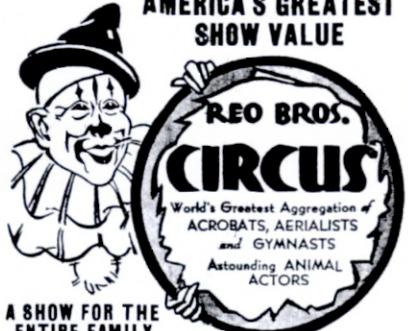
shown in the photos, including a straight bed for the cookhouse. Another for the light plant was lettered with the show title. The reported 24 foot semi is not pictured but it no doubt carried the poles, seats, canvas and props for the big top. The entire setup had the appearance of a ten truck show as reported.

Several performers in wild west garb appear in the Wheeler photos, some on horseback, others working with dogs. Only one is identified, a girl, Chickie Eddy, with a performing German shepherd dog. The show in all probability used some of the wild west people in the regular performance and later presented a short wild west type aftershow. A concert of this type was customary on

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HUGE WATERPROOF TENT

This newspaper ad for the 1936 Reo show used the same clown drawing that appeared on the letterhead. Pfening Archives.

tendent on Reo Bros. wrote that since the May 1 opening it had been the first circus in at every stand and that the weather had been clear.

The June 13 *Billboard* carried a story dated June 6 that was headed: "Reo show closes for reorganization." It was just a short report which said Ken Wheeler, business manager of Reo Bros. Circus, stated that the show had closed for reorganization and the management planned to resume in time to fulfill contracted fair bookings. The site of the closing was not given, nor were there any further details.

A few weeks later there was a report that Kenneth Wheeler had joined the advance department of Silver Bros. Circus as a lithographer. This show was owned by Sam Dock and was covered previously in this series. There was no further mention of Reo Bros. in the trade publications for the remainder of the season. Evidently it never resumed.

its tour. In mid September the *Billboard* said that Walter Reo and Herbert A. Douglas, of Reo Bros., caught the Dan Rice Circus parade in Chestertown, Maryland.

Reo Bros. lasted a little over a month. It wasn't the first casualty of 1936 as Maynard Bros. closed on May 18 after seven weeks on the road. A week after Reo finished Bockus & Kilonis folded. The new Bud Hawkins Circus closed early. Obert Miller, father of Dorey and Kelly, who organized his own circus in 1937, was on the Bud Hawkins show in 1936. After that show closed he joined Atterbury Bros. for the remainder of the season.

The Reo Bros. title laid dormant for eight seasons. It reappeared in 1944 during the midst of World War II. Ordinarily it would seem that with all of the war time restrictions and shortages of almost all equipment needed by a motorized under canvas circus it would be a most unlikely time for any show to make an appearance. However, the populace, coming out of the great depression and into the well paying war related industries, had money to spend and were hungry for amusement. Consequently, the war years saw a rash of new circuses hit the road in an attempt to relieve John Q. Public of some of his new found dollars. Some of the new shows flourished but many were short lived as was the case of the reborn Reo Bros.

The April 15, 1944 *Billboard* had this advertisement: "Want circus acts, useful people, cookhouse for public and workers. All privileges open. Reo Bros. Circus, Camden, N. J."

Nothing else appeared in the *Billboard* until the May 27 issue which said that Reo Bros. Circus opened on May 20 in Kenneth Squire, Pennsylvania to capacity business at both performances. The report noted the new big top was a 70 foot round with two 40s and that special attention had been directed to lighting which enhanced the value of the acts. The article closed by stating that Joe Conway was press agent.

At no time was the owner ever identi-



**Bannerline of Lloyd Peterson's sideshow on Reo in 1936. Wheeler photo in the Bradbury collection.**

fied in trade publications, but he was the same Joseph Dix Conway who headed the 1936 version.

For the 1944 tour Conway revived the four page Reo letterhead that was



**Midway and main entrance of Reo Bros. in Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania in 1936. The concession trailer is on left and sideshow on right. Circus World Museum collection.**

used in 1936. The Chestnut Street Philadelphia address was added. The same Kelty photo of the Sam B. Dill show was on the inside, but the new reproduction was better than the one used in 1936. This letterpaper was all in black ink and carried a line at the bottom



reading "Clover Hill Theatre Co., Inc. Sole Owners."

Another *Billboard* report said that Herbert A. Douglas had attended the Reo Bros. opening on May 20 in Kenneth Squire, Pennsylvania, that George Barton was equestrian director and Bob Russell was producing clown. Amplified records provide the music. Due to labor conditions the show gave only night performances. The same issue reported that William Matson was show secretary, the Garber Brothers had the concert and Bill Owens headed the brigade of billposters.

Very little of the show's route is known. It played Lansdale, Pennsylvania on May 27 and Ambler on the 29th.

In mid June the show was routed in New Jersey and business was reported as being satisfactory.

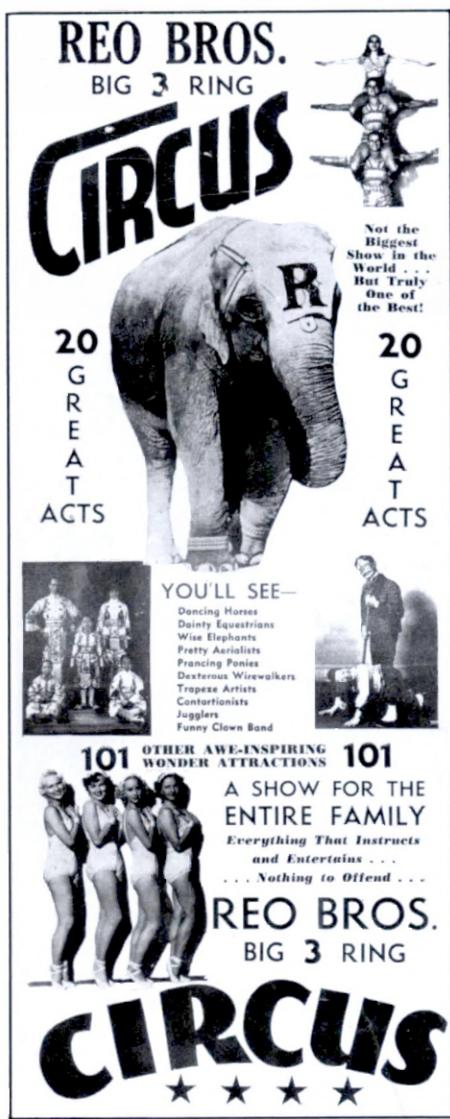
The June 17, 1944 *Billboard* carried this advertisement: "Reo Bros. Circus can always use acts and useful people. State what you can and will do.

Reo Bros. Circus, Room 807, 1011 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa."

Evidently as was true in 1936 the 1944 Reo show was out only a few weeks. The July 1, 1944 *Billboard* carried the final news from the show during the season. The article said that Reo Bros. was completing its dates in eastern Pennsylvania and business had been most satisfactory. A special unit, directed by Bill Watkins, had been formed to play fair dates. A new line of blocked paper had been designed by the Quality Show Print Co.

Nothing further appeared in the *Billboard* concerning Reo Bros. in 1944. If in fact a unit was formed for fair dates there was no mention in subsequent issues. In all probability Reo Bros. closed for the season in late June or early July. This could have been for any number of reasons, the best of which was probably on account of wartime

**Reo Bros. Circus light plant in 1936. Wheeler photo in the Bradbury collection.**



This herald was used by the Reo Bros. Circus in 1944. Pfening Archives.

conditions, inability to get tires, replacement parts, or even adequate rationing of gasoline. It was noted early in the season that the show was giving only night shows because of labor shortages. A severe labor shortage making it difficult to move on time could have caused the early closing. In any case the show quit after a very limited tour.

In December of 1944 Conway began to make plans to tour a circus again in 1945. A letter in the Pfening Archives tells of his interest in hiring acts for the following season. Using a Reo Bros. Circus letterhead Conway wrote

on December 26, 1944 to Frank C. Fisher in Jackson, Michigan. The letter reads, "Would like to know if you would be interested in putting your acts on my show for the tenting season. We will open in April and anticipate a long season. I would appreciate hearing from you and learning what you have to offer and for how much. Our show is well financed and therefore responsible and enjoys a favorable reputation among performers and executives. Awaiting your favorable reply." It is signed Joseph Conway.

In the spring of 1945 Joseph Dix Conway did again try his luck with another circus. He changed the title, selecting his middle name, to make it Dix Bros. Circus. A Dix Bros. Circus letterhead was printed in black and had the Chestnut Street Philadelphia address. In small print a line read, "Community Circus Association, Inc. Owner."

As usual Conway's name was never mentioned in any of the brief accounts of the show that appeared in the *Billboard*. The first notice of the 1945 circus came in the form of an advertisement in the April 21, 1945 *Billboard*. It read: "Joe Reo wants truck drivers for Dix Brothers Circus. Can place additional acts and concession help. String base player and competent press agent. Room 807, 1011 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa."

It is obvious the "Joe Reo" in the ad was in fact Joe Conway. Another ad came two weeks later. "Dix Bros. Circus wants ticket sellers, ushers, ticket takers. Experience not necessary. Girl acrobatic dancer, piano accordian. Trap drummer. Novelty acts"

Evidently the show opened in late May although there was nothing about it in the trade publications. A small herald in the Pfening Archives is dated May 4 at North Catasauqua, Pennsylvania. Acts listed on the herald were Captain Dock's educated animals; Servais Sylvester, conjuror extraordinary; the Kentucky Hillbillies, Pop Brownlee and Little Willie; Pete the pony; and Lady Alice's trained goats. It further stated that the show began at 8 P. M. with the ticket wagon opening half hour earlier.

The May 12, 1945 *Billboard* had this ad: "Dix Bros. Circus wants. Wild and domestic animal acts, 2 more

clowns. Girl contortionists. Man to handle sound system, Ushers. Can place side show, pit show and ball game. Want lunch stand help."

The advertisements were now coming weekly but still there was no kind of mention of the show editorially in the *Billboard*. There was a change of address in the ad that appeared in the May 26 issue. In this one the show wanted a business manager and advance agent.

The same clown face appeared in the Dix Bros. Circus newspaper ad in 1945. Pfening Archives.

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July  
2**

**DIX BROS.  
COMBINED**

**CIRCUS**

**ALL NEW THIS YEAR  
IN THE BIG TENT  
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**AMAZING ANIMAL  
ACTORS**

**TOM AND JERRY  
THE BOXING CATS**

**The South American  
Man of Mystery  
SERVAIS  
SYLVESTER**

Trenton, New Jersey was listed as the address. It would appear that the show was being framed in Trenton, while the Philadelphia address was that of the owner.

The Philadelphia address was used in a June 9 ad in which the show wanted a horse act, a family act and a sister team doing two or more.

The following route was given as part of a June 30 ad. Dates listed were Hughesville, Pennsylvania, June 30; Montoursville, July 1; Dushore, July 2; Monroeton, July 3; and Canton July 4. In the ad Dix Bros. wanted animal, ground and aerial acts to "enlarge the show. Cowboys with stock to handle concert. Need ushers and truck drivers. Also secretary for office. Again state lowest salary."

A newspaper ad for the Dushore July 2 date listed the Kirkjillos, acrobats; Garber Bros. liberty horse act and Tom and Jerry, the boxing cats.

The final want ad for the show came in the July 14 *Billboard*. This time Dix Bros. was seeking acts and useful people, hillbillies, cowboys with stock, animal, ground and aerial acts. The address was listed as a single stand in Groton, New York on July 14.

A one liner in "Under the Marquee" in the July 21 *Billboard* was the only clue to any of the acts or performers on the Dix Bros. Circus. It said that Mr. and Mrs. Fred Timon of Oswego, New York spent July 11 with Sam Dock on Dix Bros. Circus in Dundee, New York.

Sam Dock was an old circus trouper who had operated his own shows and had been associated with many shows going back to the 1870s. He was an accomplished trainer specializing in domestic animals. As we will shortly see Dock could have easily provided the bulk of the Dix performance himself. By now the show was faltering and expected to close shortly when the following ad appeared in the July 28 *Billboard*.

The ad read: "At liberty, Sam Dock. 6 animal acts. Route July 20, Hancock, N.Y.; July 21, Roscoe, N.Y.; Castle Creek, N.Y. follows."

This was the Dix Bros. route as there is an ad for the show in Hancock on July 20 in the Pfening Archives. In the same *Billboard* was notice that Le-

wis Bros. Circus had returned to winter quarters at Jackson, Michigan after uncertain business in Indiana and Michigan. And although not mentioned, evidently Dix Bros. also closed about the same time.

The last reference to the Dix show appeared in an ad in the August 4, 1945 *Billboard*. It read: "For sale, 65 foot round end tent with two 40 foot middles. Will buy middles for a 50 and sideshow banners. Joe Reo, Room 807, 1011 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa."

Nothing is known about the disposition of the equipment.

Sam Dock joined the Bob Dickman Circus at Windsor, New York on August

8. A short article in the August 25, 1945 *Billboard* said that Bob Dickman's One Ring Circus was on ten trucks playing smaller towns and cities in Pennsylvania. It was at Hallstead, Pennsylvania August 18. The program included Sam Dock working ponies, a mule, monkeys, goats and a dog. Dock's daughter, Claire Brison, did ring contortion and had the concessions.

Nothing further is known about Joseph Dix Conway's circus activities. When his photo appeared in *Billboard* in the early 1950s with some other showmen he was identified as having once owned Reo Bros. and Dix Bros. circuses.

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Written by Jon Carroll

Designed by Michael Patrick Cronan

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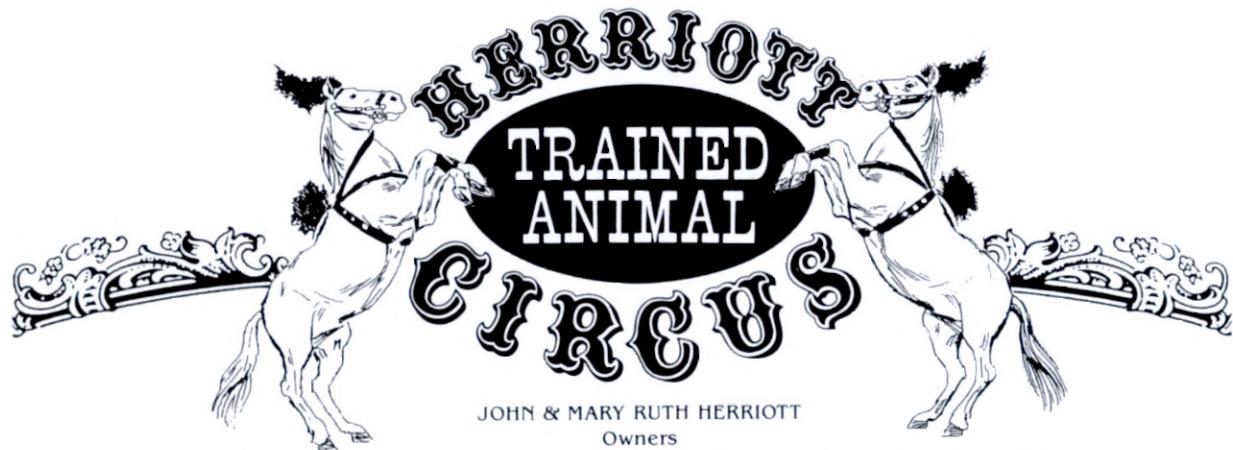
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# The Scenic Riding Acts

BY STUART THAYER

The individual riding act has gone through little change in the two hundred years since it was first defined in England. When one considers the number of riders who have appeared before the public, the unchanging acts offered by them over the years seems to parallel the development in organized athletic contests. Change would seem to lie only in the increased skill of individuals, rather than in the game itself. Baseball, as an example, with adjustments in the rules, is the same game it was at the turn of the century. If this criteria is applied to circus riding, then the advancement of the science is really dependant on the improved skills of the performers. We don't know how good a rider John Bill Ricketts was because few of those who commented on his ability had seen anyone else ride in the ring. Yet the acts he presented were nearly the same as both those offered at Astley's twenty years before and those being shown by riders at the time of the American Civil War.

Comparing similar activities from different eras is not true comparison, granted. The *Hamlet* we see on the stage today is not the same as that presented by actors of a hundred years ago, but the play itself is the same. The presentations suit the age; we get the *Hamlet* that mirrors our own time.

The earliest riders offered such routines as standing on their heads in the saddle, leaping garters placed in their paths, bursting balloons (paper covered hoops) and leaping from horse to ground to horse again. In time this type of act came to be called a "principal" act and is seen advertised as "a principal act of riding." Etymologically, it referred to the fact that it was the original type of the action. Every rider had to begin with the parts of the principal act and most of them never went beyond them. They improved their performance by leaping more and more gar-

ters or leaping higher garters or even progressing from pad to bareback riding, but the essential act remained as we have described it and was limited,

beard, and the like, which had been imported to America and discarded when the circus took to wagon travel, were still popular in Europe for many years and survived into this century.

Hippodramatic performances called for some acting ability and the principal parts were sometimes held by actors, sometimes by circus riders. A circus rider who could act was the most valuable to a manager. As far as the public was concerned there was no great distinction made between early dramatic actors and early circus performers. Ducrow, producing and acting in hippodramas, was able to invent ring acts that used his hippodramatic skills. Part of the reason for doing this may well have been that his traveling company was too small to present the hippodramas to advantage, thus he lit upon the idea of appearing alone in the ring in a dramatic role. About 1820 he introduced what came to be called scenic riding. It was a departure from the principal act in that it was essentially a pantomime. The rider presented a dumb-show, a series of scenes in the life of the subject, in appropriate costume and on horseback. The principal rider was an athlete, the scenic rider was an actor; the distinction was not always true of either of them.

The horse in the principal act was the *raison d'être* for the rider's appearance, without the horse his act would have been simple and dull. In the scenic act, however, the horse was the stage upon which the rider performed and was really not necessary to an appreciation of the presentation. The same thing could have been performed on a stage or on the ground. By doing it on horseback the actor added an extra dimension--his ability as a rider. By necessity, he was both athlete and actor and if he was good at it he gave a much-appreciated performance.

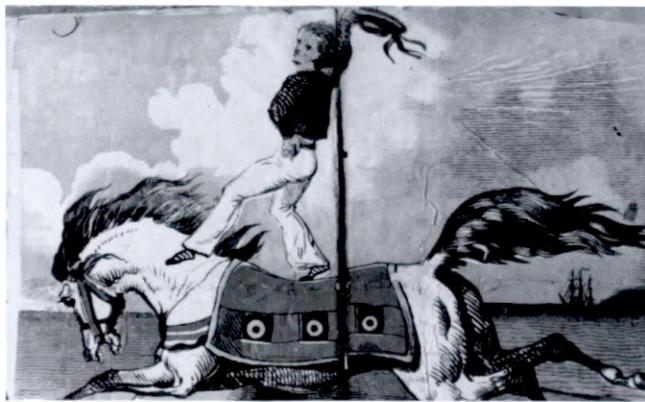
Ducrow's scenic riding evolved from



Andrew Ducrow is depicted in this drawing as the "God of Fame." Collection A. H. Saxon.

surely, by the fact that it had to be performed on a moving horse.

As in any endeavor, an extremely talented person will always find a way to transcend the ordinary and in circus riding this person proved to be the great Andrew Ducrow. In the 1820's, when the American circus was drawing away from its European antecedents, from the theatre-type presentations that had theretofore been its mainstay, European riders were--and were to remain--still under the influence of the "baggage" of the theatre and their presentations reflected it. The hippodramas--*Timour the Tartar*, *Cataract of the Ganges*, *Blue-*



The "Shipwrecked Sailor" is shown in this illustration in this drawing from an 1851 Aaron Turner poster. Circus World Museum collection.

presentations that were only a step from the final product. In 1818, he performed what he termed *poses plastiques*, which are usually described in English as "attitudes." These were poses on horseback similar to the "statue acts" of our own time. The horses moved, but the rider, having struck a pose, maintained it for some moments, then struck another. These were on the order of well-known sculpture and had been done as ground acts both in the circus and the theatre. Among the subjects Ducrow offered were "The Gladiator," in which he wore a Trojan helmet and carried a shield and a spear, and "Zephyr" and "Mercury," in which he struck poses emulating those mythic figures.

In 1820, he introduced "Bouquet de l'Amour." In this act he rode on two horses and was joined by his sister in acting as Zephyr and Cupid in a dance of love, as it were. The attraction here, as in all Ducrow's riding, was his extreme grace and skill. "Bouquet de l'Amour" was a transitional piece between the attitudes, as in the Gladiator, and scenic riding.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning of the scenic act, but Arthur Saxon has written that it was in 1820. The difficulty is that the title of acts, which is all we have to go on in most cases, may have been applied to a non-scenic act prior to the actual introduction of the scenic act itself.

One of the earliest of which we have a description is "The Death of Othello,"



The "Indian Hunter" is depicted in this cut from the same Aaron Turner poster. Circus World Museum collection.

or, "The Moor Defending His Flag." This was presented with the French title since Ducrow offered himself as a Frenchman in England and as an Englishman in France. It is definitely a scenic act and is described in the *Journal de Marseilles* as follows: ". . . costumed as an African, his face blackened by tropic suns. . . his lance at rest, (he spots his rival). . . With what fury he attacks his enemy! With what art he seems to evade his blows. . . But, he is wounded, the steel escapes his falling hand. Summoning all his remaining strength he draws his scimitar. Rage discomposes his features and flashes in his eyes. Death, however, approaches, and his sabre is no longer swift, his final blows. . . expire before reaching his enemy's bowels. The hero is dying, blood stains his armor; he falls."

Melodramatic as this description is, we assume Ducrow's presentation was no less so. And it certainly serves to separate scene riding from principal riding.

"The Dying Moor" was among the very first scenic acts to be shown in America. John (or Jean) Richard (d. 1830) offered a version of it to audiences at the Lafayette Theatre in New York in February, 1826. We find Edwin Dérious doing it in 1839 and John Shindle in 1842, but it was not as popular in this country as were some others and we think that perhaps this was because of racial prejudice in America.

However, there were many other scenic acts, all of them Ducrow's inventions. We have found no such act in an American program that was not first shown by Ducrow who had introduced most of them by 1825.

In the same year that Richard performed "The Dying Moor" Samuel Tattnall (fl. 1809-1839) did "Indian Hunter," which was far and away the most popular of such acts in this country. Fully forty per-cent of the scenic acts we have found in America were on this theme. Called "Indian Hunter," or "Indian Chief," or "Flying Indian," they depicted either an Indian on the warpath or at the hunt. A dance, a stalking, shooting the bow and arrow, bringing home the trophy, were the various parts of these routines. Sometimes the hero died in battle, sometimes he was triumphant.

Despite the fact that the scene was performed on horseback, it did not depict Plains Indians, as little was known of them at the time. It was a pantomime of Eastern tribes, Mohicans, Seminoles and the like. Even then, the costuming was a far cry from actuality. Most of the representations in advertising appear to use the dress of the cigar store Indian, perhaps as close as the artists got to the real thing.

Another favorite, "The Shipwrecked Sailor," complete with leavetaking, climbing the rigging, facing a storm, and being cast on a desert isle, was first shown in America in 1841. Charles J. Rogers of the firm of Spalding & Rogers was the man who introduced it here. Others who presented sailor acts over the years were Henry Gardner, Frank Whittaker, John Shindle and Charles Sherwood.

In his advertising, I. P. Frost, man-

ager of Frost & Co.'s American Circus, listed the various acts in the repertoires of his performers. The scenic riding turns were:

The Sailor's Return  
The Flying Indian  
The Dying Moor  
The Peruvian Hunter  
The Greek Patriot  
The Reaper  
The Brigand

It was the custom of scenic riders--"scene riders," in the vernacular--to have the horse cloth suggest the topic of the scene. Thus, a tartan blanket would be used for "The Highlander," an Indian blanket for the various "Indian" acts, a leopard or lion skin for "Othello," and for the "Shipwrecked Sailor," a painted row of gun muzzles emerging from gun ports.

Scenic acts were still to be seen as late as the 1870's, James and William DeMott were two of its last practitioners. The histrionics and emoting had run their course. The action acts had taken over, performances in which "whirlwind riding" were featured, very fast, very athletic; the athlete supplanted the actor. Also, the opposite extreme from scenic riding, *haute ecole* was in the ascendancy, a saddled rider controlling the horses in deft, precise movements.

It is difficult for a modern reader to appreciate the wonder that the scenic acts imposed on their audience. But the overdone dramatics were at one with the times. Dramatic actors, politicians, editors, even preachers, made their points by hyperbole and scene-gnawing. There was little subtlety in the society at any level.

The information on Ducrow's development as a scenic rider is found in A. H. Saxon, *The Life and Art of Andrew Ducrow & The Romantic Age of the English Circus*, (Archon, Hamden, Connecticut, 1978), pp. 109-113.

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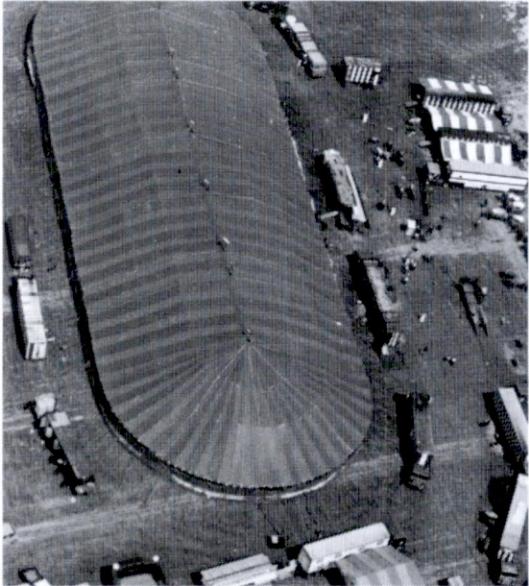


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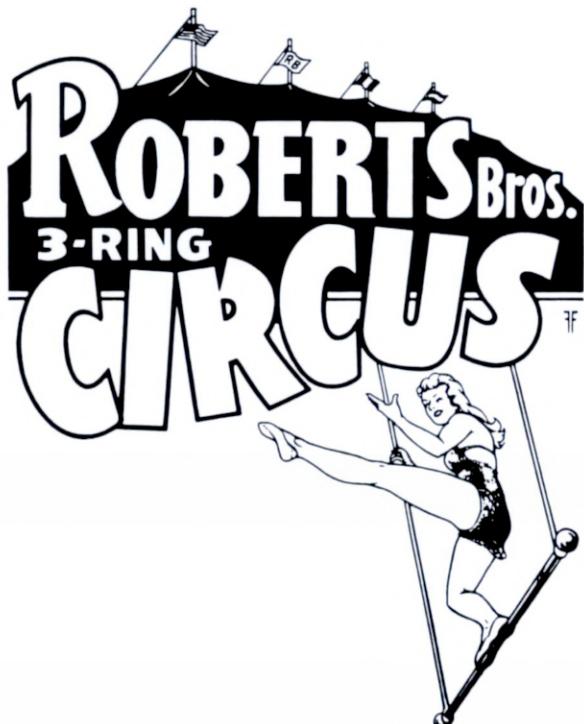
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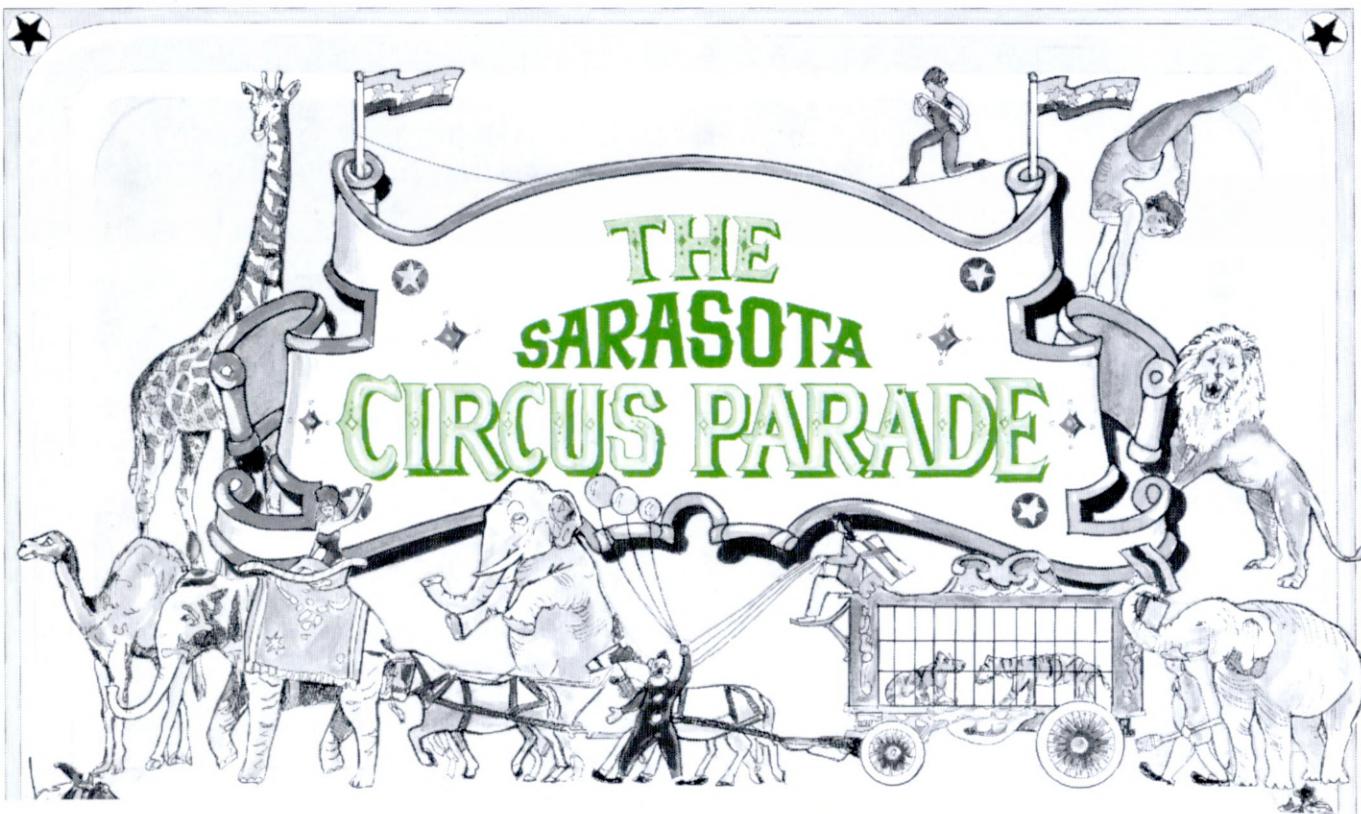
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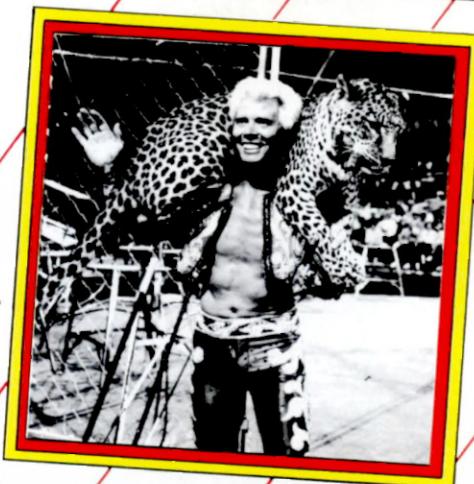
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